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# THE NEW YORKER

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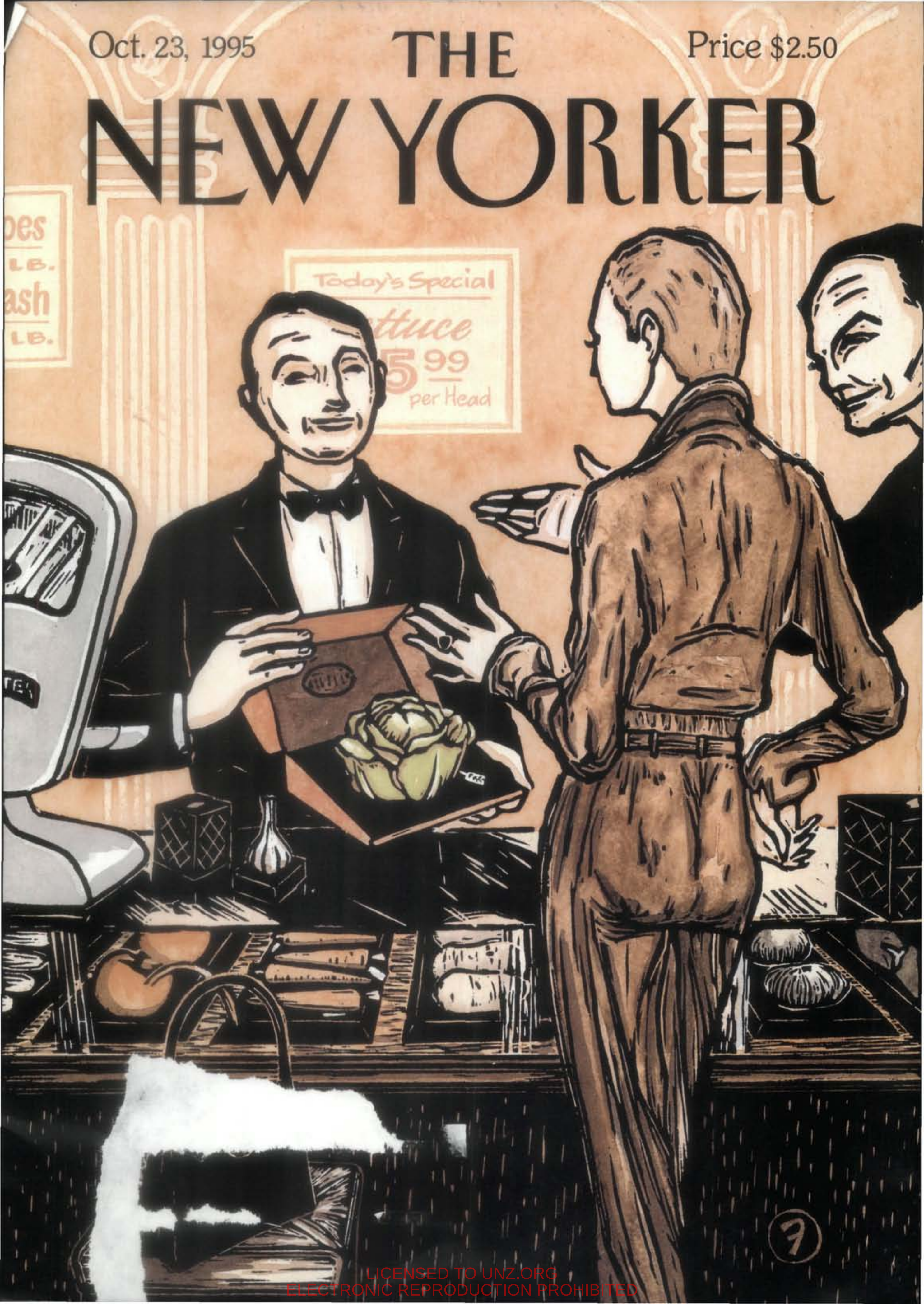
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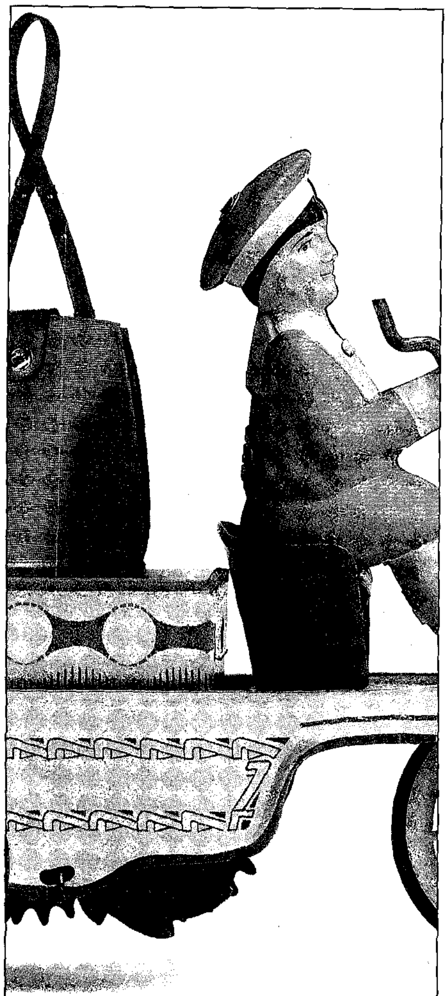

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OCTOBER 23, 1995

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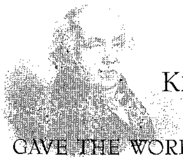

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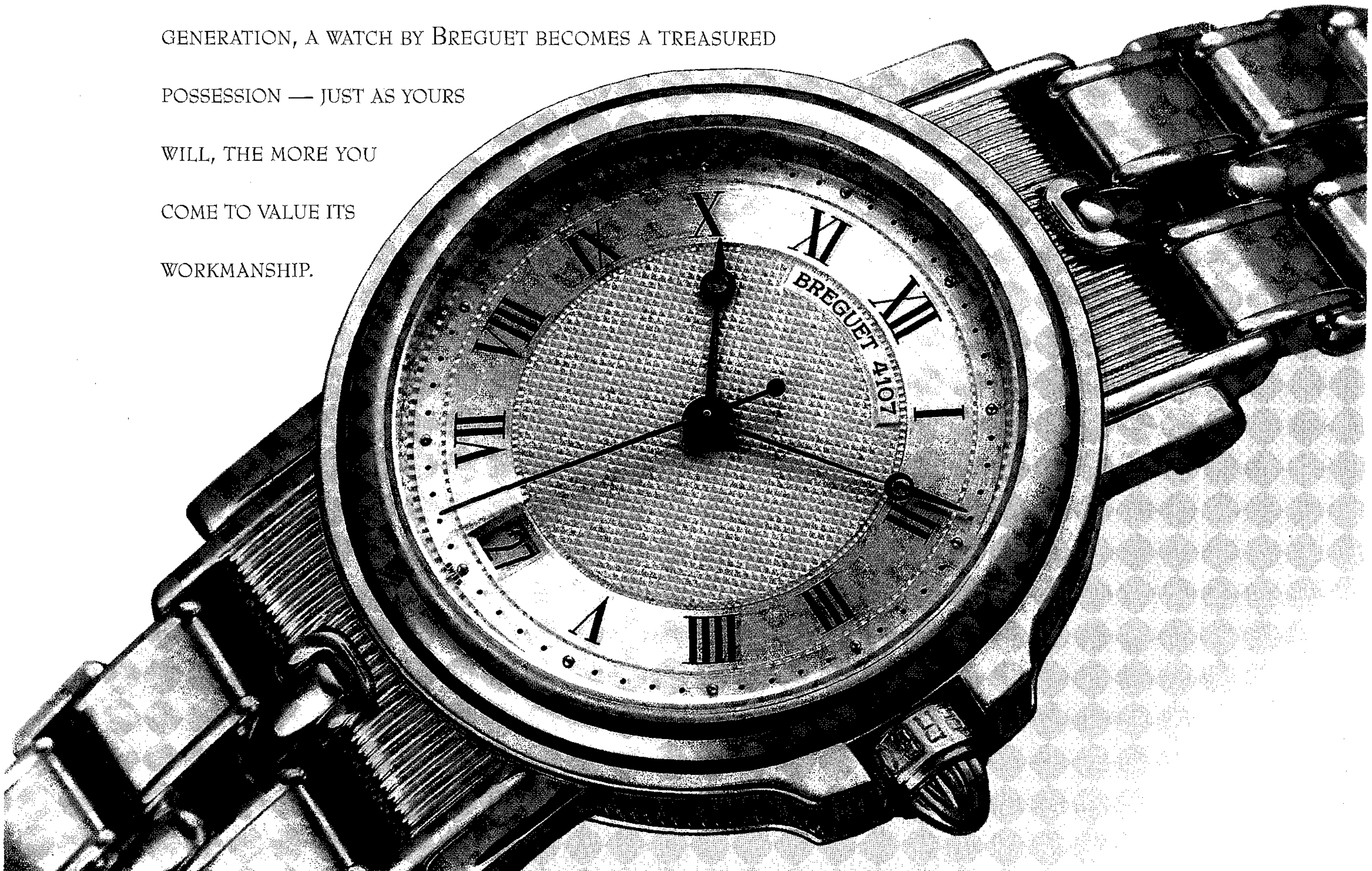

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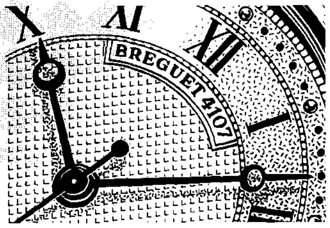

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# COMMENT

## THE DUNCIAD

*In the fight over the schools, everyone looks bad.*

A CEASEFIRE now obtains in the great New York City schools-chancellor wars, as it does in the Balkans; and it's anybody's guess which one will break down first. Last spring, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani hounded the previous chancellor, Ramon Cortines, out of office with a campaign of sustained invective. This fall, the Mayor tried, and failed, to install a replacement whose sole qualification appeared to be a willingness to bend to City Hall's diktat; the central Board of Education then tried, and failed, to push through a candidate the Mayor called "unacceptable"; and finally both sides, exhausted, settled on Rudolph Crew, the superintendent of the Tacoma, Washington, schools. It's scarcely surprising that Mr. Crew's arrival, last week, was greeted with little of the traditional new-chancellor-in-town jubilation. Everyone was weary, and wary.

The battle between the Mayor and the board, in abeyance for the moment, has been a mock epic, a Homeric food fight. Perhaps the one positive result of the whole dismally negative affair is that it will cure the city's habit of presumptively lionizing each new chancellor, under the illusion that this one, this time, will "turn around" a system that actually seems almost beyond human agency. It has become too obvious to ignore that the problem is the system itself—the beast, not its nominal head. Mayor Giuliani has apparently come to this realization, though too late to spare the beleaguered Mr. Cortines. Herman Badillo, the Mayor's main adviser on the schools, explains Mr. Giuliani's support of Dr. Crew, whose views seem scarcely distinguishable from those of the despised Cortines, by saying, "If you have a chancellor in place, the focus of the battle could turn to Albany."

The Mayor wants the New York State Legislature to dissolve the board and give him control over the schools. He is a man who sees politics as an arena of wills rather than of choices; he believes that the way to turn the schools around is to vest authority in a strong-willed figure—i.e., himself. The board, of course, disagrees; and its president, Carol Gresser, has succeeded Ray Cortines as chief mayoral martyr by virtue of saying so in public. All this makes for great thea-

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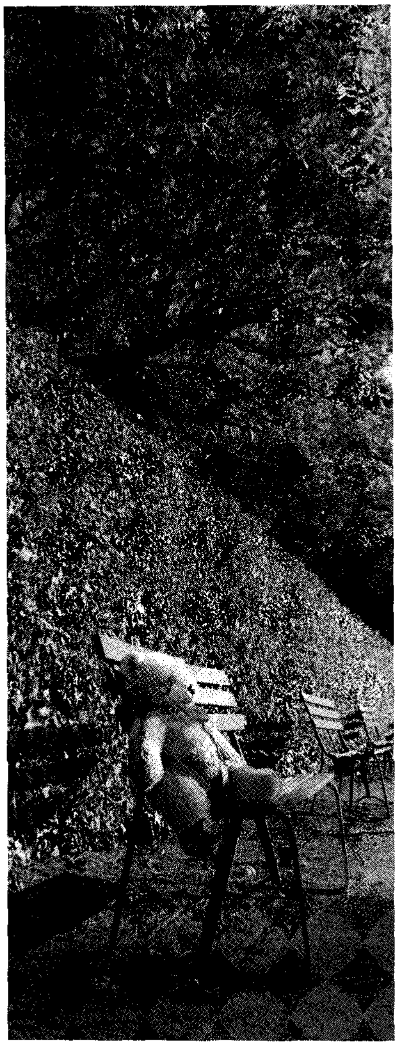

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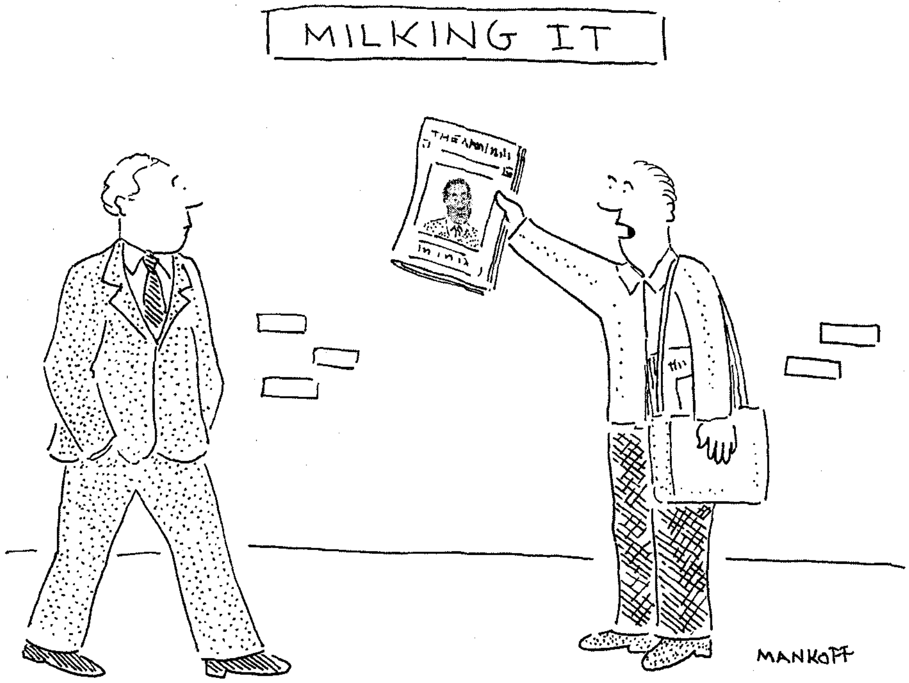

*"Read all about it! O.J. still not guilty!"*

tre—a few weeks ago, before the Treaty of Crew, Ms. Gresser said of the Mayor, at a public board meeting, "If he can't control the city's schools, he would rather harm them irreparably"—but it also perpetuates the heroic model of school reform.

It's hard to feel, after the events of recent months, that either the Mayor or the board should have control over the destinies of a million schoolchildren. The Mayor seems indifferent to most aspects of schooling except the cost. His pre-Crew endorsement of a candidate for chancellor who was known mostly for zealous politicking implied a deep cynicism, or perhaps nonchalance, about the schools. The Mayor has thoroughly undermined his own case, and thus obscured his argument that he must be able to exercise some control over an activity for which his government pays nearly half the bills.

Carol Gresser says, rightly, that the Mayor's proposal tells children, in effect, "You're just akin to Ports and Terminals." But if the argument is that education must be protected from politics, then leaving it in the hands of the board is clearly not the way to protect it. The interests that the board represents are political ones, not educational ones; most of its members are political creatures. None of them, as the former chancellor Frank Macchiarola says, "has brought a measure of distinction from somewhere else to the board."

Who, then, should control the system? A number of people—including Ed Sadowsky, a former board member—have proposed that the board not be abolished but, rather, selected by the Mayor from a pool submitted by some sort of screening panel. The idea of a panel of distinguished and independent citizens sounds quaint, and even élitist; but old-fashioned disinterestedness would be vastly preferable to the raw play of interests which now dominates both the central board and, even more intensively, the city's thirty-two locally elected district boards. Such a system would consolidate authority while protecting the schools from mayoral whim.

But giving City Hall more control over the schools wouldn't solve any of the deeper problems, though you might not suspect that from listening to the Mayor. The board, after all, doesn't control the schools now; nobody does. The system is neither effectively authoritarian, as the Mayor might like it to be, nor effectively democratic. School principals have precious little control over teachers, budgets, or even janitors. The central board has control only over the high schools; the district boards run the grade schools and the junior highs. Union contracts bristle with due-process rights carried to extremes. The atomization of power means that everyone can afford to wait for someone else to make the next move; so stasis reigns, and as a result the Mayor concludes that there's nothing for it but brute force.

Yet this is the first time everyone has agreed that the system doesn't work. The Speaker of the State Assembly, Sheldon Silver, who is a Democrat, and who was until recently a believer in the heroic model, convened a summit meeting last week to begin a discussion of needed legal changes. Things don't look propitious, it's true, since Mr. Silver started the talks off by excluding the Republicans and including the Teamsters. But the debate, once started, may take on a life of its own. The state might pass a charter-school law, as nineteen other states have now done, to help create public schools that are free from bureaucratic and union control. And there are many critical changes that need not be adjudicated in Albany. Reformers like the education scholar Diane Ravitch have been calling not only for charter schools but for a variety of changes that would make individual schools truly autonomous. Both Ms. Gresser and Mr. Giuliani, in fact, have called for giving schools substantial control over their own budgets. Virtually all parties to the debate now agree that a far bigger share of the school budget—now eight billion dollars—must go directly to the schools.

This surprising consensus is currently hidden behind a curtain of grapeshot. And perhaps the combatants like it that way. As long as the debate is cast in personal terms, everyone can ignore the genuinely tough issues, such as the teachers' contract, which, to the despair of reform-minded principals, includes such ruinous anachronisms as the right of a senior teacher to bump a junior out of his or her school. But neither the Mayor nor the board wants to challenge the teachers, whose union is smart and politically powerful. Perhaps the trick is to attack all the moated castles at once—the unions, the district boards, the central board, the bureaucracy. Or we can wait until the first time the Mayor questions Rudy Crew's courage, and then start the whole dismal round all over again.

—JAMES TRAUB

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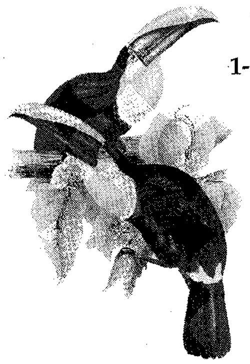

# IN THE MAIL

## REMEMBERING KUNSTLER

Your piece on William Kunstler (The Talk of the Town, September 18th, by James Traub) was carping and mean-spirited. As the other significant lawyer in the two trials of Larry Davis, let me assure you that the two acquittals were based solely on the convincing nature of the evidence. The acquittals may well have mirrored a level of apprehension about police aggression in our local Third World communities (apparently richly justified), but they were grounded in the reality that Larry Davis, a native son of the South Bronx, dared to defend his black life against a murderous crew of killer cops who invaded his sister's home. That a shotgun-toting New York City police officer fired the first shot was proved beyond any doubt, and a jury then found that Larry's resistance was justified.

And, speaking of native sons, Black Rage is real, but only the Bill Kunstlers of the legal profession have the courage, grace, and wit to breathe life into it as a defensive courtroom position. And now he is gone, and we are the poorer for it.

LYNNE F. STEWART
New York City

Your article about William Kunstler raises interesting ethical questions. Acknowledging that Kunstler stretched his principles when he defended Larry Davis and Colin Ferguson, two black men accused of multiple murders, you nevertheless imply that his defense of the Black Panthers supported a good cause. But it was precisely the hate speech of Black Panthers and other Black Power activists that helped trigger murder, arson, stoning, and looting in dozens of cities during the sixties. You lament "the disappearance of causes once eminently worth fighting for." Allow me to suggest two: the restoration of civility in public discourse, and an end to apologizing for black crime.

ERNEST W. LEFEVER
Chevy Chase, Md.

Late one evening in the early nineteen-sixties, I was making my way home to my apartment in the West Forties and, on glancing across an unusually quiet street, I saw William Kunstler. In a knee-jerk reaction (no doubt due to my conservative tendencies), I yelled, "William Kunstler, you're a jerk!" Quickly turning his head, he stared and yelled in reply, "So are you!" Then, without missing a beat, he waved. I waved back, astonished at what I was doing. Whatever personal feelings people may have about his practice of the law, everyone must agree that he had style.

JACK BALLARD
Lewisburg, W.Va.

## THE SECRET OF LISTENING

During a time of jaundiced opinions about the failure of our public schools, what a delight to read Sara Mosle's tender account "Writing Down Secrets" (Annals of Childhood, September 18th). It's remarkable how a simple act of kindness—listening—can evoke such rich and poignant feelings from children who come from neighborhoods that many of us perceive only as impoverished. Obviously, Mosle touched the lives of her young students in a very powerful way. We can only hope that she may someday return to the classroom to share her wonderful gift.

PETER COOLSEN
Milwaukee, Wis.

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*Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "In the Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.*

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## THE THEATRE

### *The Right Role*

UTA HAGEN has garnered Tonys for her performances in "The Country Girl" (1950) and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (1962) and plenty of accolades of the Living National Treasure variety, but in her six decades on the stage she has rarely felt fated to play a part. Seven years ago, though, after Nicholas Wright's drama "Mrs. Klein" opened in London, her telephone began to ring. "Everyone who saw it," she says, "called up to say that the title role"—the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein—"was written for me. What scared me about that is that she was a monster." All the same, Hagen decided that her friends were right, and she began researching Klein's life, paying special attention to the mysterious death of the analyst's son, in 1934, which forms the basis of the play. The process of preparing for the role has been so protracted (Hagen compiled a small mountain of material; producers came and went; the rights proved difficult to secure) that she can't quite believe that the play, now in previews, is finally going to open (on October 24, at the Lucille Lortel). "I'm so happy I could die," she says. "But not before at least one more long run."

### OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)*

**FOOL MOON**—Clowning and music with Bill Irwin, David Shiner, and North Carolina's Red Clay Ramblers, who return to Broadway with their 1993 show for a limited engagement. Previews begin Oct. 21. (Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

**FULL GALLOP**—Manhattan Theatre Club's season opener examines the later career of the fashion editor Diana Vreeland. Mary Louise Wilson, who stars, co-wrote the script with Mark Hampton. Directed by Nicholas Martin. Opens Oct. 18 at 7:30. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

**HELLO, DOLLY!**—Carol Channing reprises the role of Dolly Levi, the matchmaker in pursuit of a millionaire, which she created in the 1963 musical. Lee Roy Reams directs. Two previews on Oct. 18. Opens Oct. 19 at 6:30. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

**THE MEMORANDUM**—Václav Havel's comedy takes aim at workplace language and politics. An Independent Theatre Company production, directed by Michelle Gigante. Opens Oct. 18 at 8. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088.)

**MRS. KLEIN**—Uta Hagen stars in a suspense drama by Nicholas Wright. In previews through Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 24 at 6:45. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

**THE MODEL APARTMENT**—A new play by Donald Margulies, about a couple whose mentally ill daughter disrupts their retirement plans. In previews through Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 24 at 8. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

**THE MONOGAMIST**—A poet discovers that his wife is having an affair with one of her students, in Christopher Kyle's satirical comedy. Directed by Scott Elliott. Previews begin Oct. 20. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

**MURDER AT MINSING MANOR: A NANCY BOYS MYSTERY**—Everett Quinton and his Ridiculous Theatrical Company take on the mystery genre in this farce by Michael Simon and Richard Simon. Mr. Quinton stars as the heroine, Glory Holden. In previews through Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 24 at 8. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

**NEW ENGLAND**—A dark comedy by Richard Nelson, about a family of English transplants at odds with America. Directed by Howard Davies. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

**NORTHEAST LOCAL**—Lincoln Center Theatre presents Terry Alexander, Eileen Heckart, Anthony LaPaglia, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio in a new play by Tom Donaghy, which follows a working-class family through three decades. Gerald Gutierrez is the director. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

**PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE**—This play from the pen of Steve Martin, which had its première in 1993 at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, is set in 1904, in a Parisian bistro where a young Albert Einstein (Mark Nelson) and a younger Pablo Picasso (Tim Hopper) discuss big ideas. Randall Arney is the director. In previews through Oct. 21. Opens Oct. 22 at 6:45. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

**RIFF RAFF**—Laurence Fishburne makes his playwriting and directorial début and stars in this drama, set during the twenty-four hours following a drug robbery, which examines the relationships between an ex-con, his ex-partner, and a junkie. Previews begin Oct. 18. (Circle Repertory Company, 159 Bleecker St. 239-6200.)

**SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD**—The WPA Theatre opens its nineteenth season with a revue written by Jason Robert Brown and directed by Daisy Prince. In previews. (519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

**SPOONBREAD AND STRAWBERRY WINE**—Norma Jean Darden—model, caterer, actress—shares recipes and talks about her family, in a play inspired by the cookbook she wrote with her sister, Carole Darden. In previews Oct. 18-20. Opens Oct. 21 at 8. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

**SWINGING ON A STAR**—A musical tribute to the lyrics of Johnny Burke ("Misty," "Pennies from Heaven," "Moonlight Becomes You"), written and directed by Michael Leeds, with choreography by Kathleen Marshall. In previews through Oct. 21; opens Oct. 22 at 6:30. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

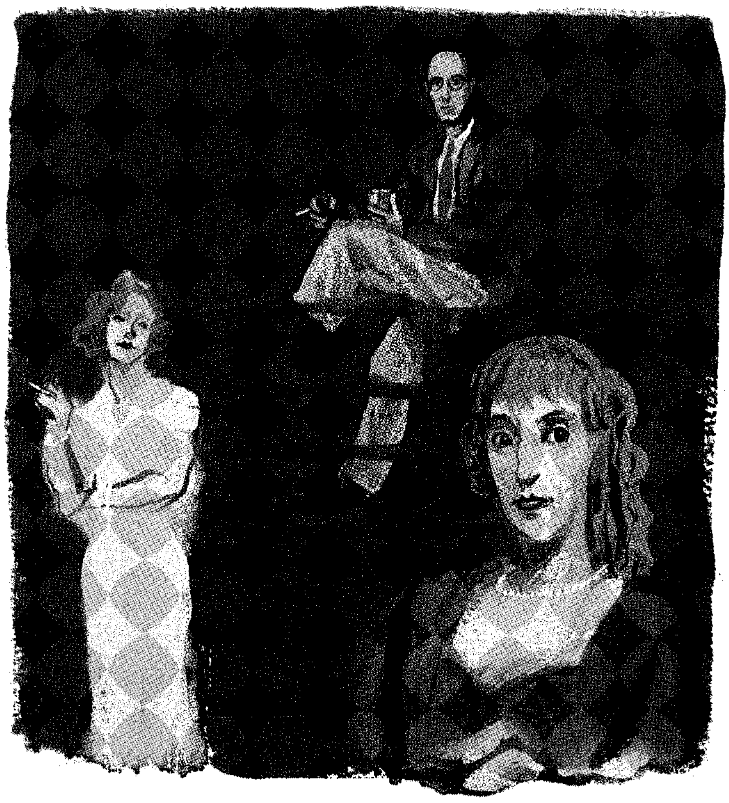
**THE TEMPEST**—The New York Shakespeare Festival's Central Park production, starring Patrick Stewart and directed by George C. Wolfe, moves to Broadway for a twelve-week run. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

**VICTOR/VICTORIA**—Julie Andrews has returned to Broadway to star, with Tony Roberts, Michael Nouri, and Rachel York, in a theatrical version of the 1982 movie. Written and directed by Blake Edwards. Choreography by Rob Marshall; score by the late Henry Mancini. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

**ZOMBIES FROM THE BEYOND**—A musical sendup of the science-fiction movies of the fifties. In previews through Oct. 22. Opens Oct. 23 at 8. (Players, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

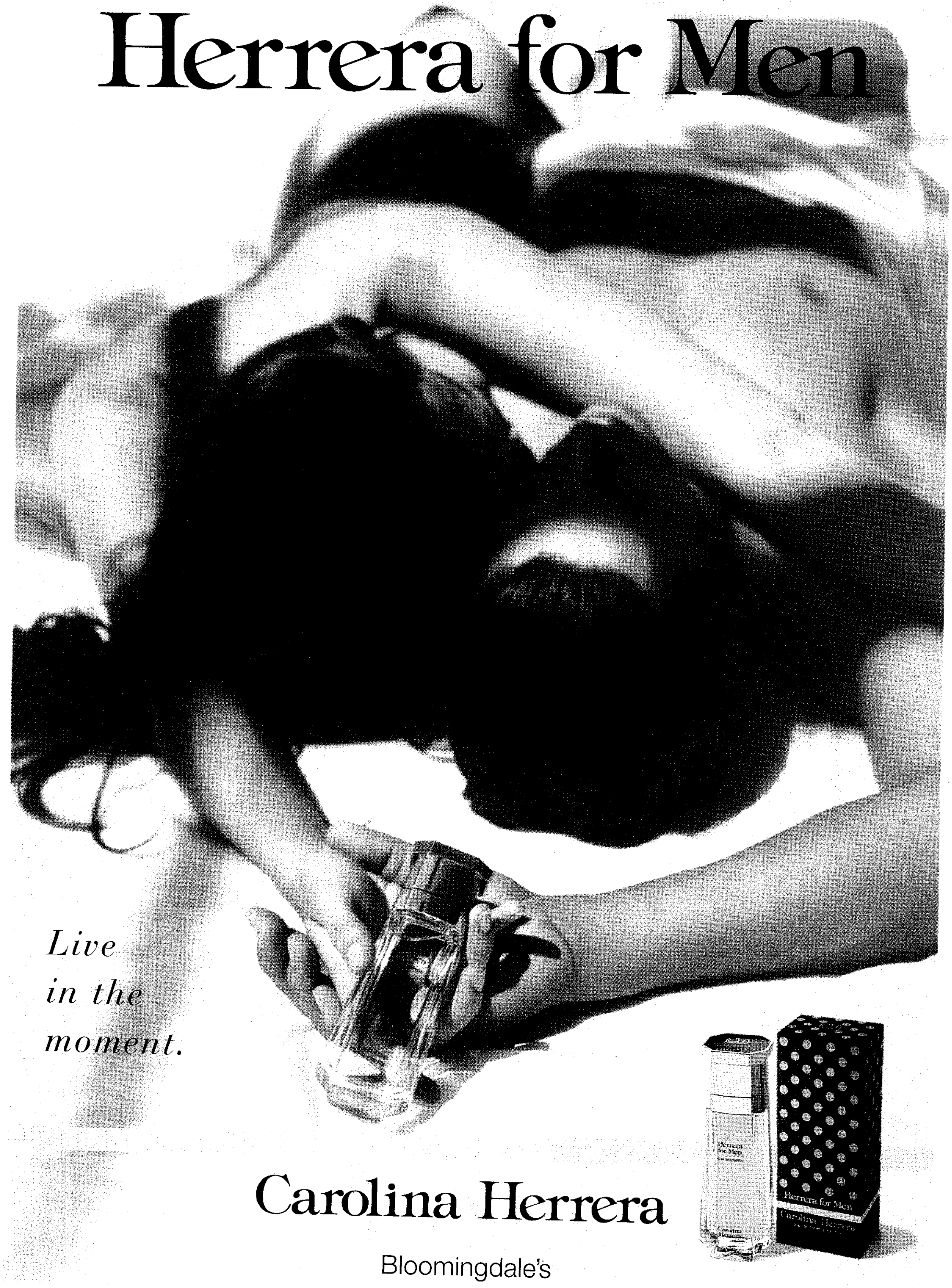
### OPENED RECENTLY

**BANJY PUSSY RAGING**—Idris Mignott's new solo work, a comic look at sex, class, race, and glamour. Directed by Daisy von Scherler Mayer. Wednesdays at 7:30, and



*Felicity Huffman, David Pittu, and Mary McCann, in "Dangerous Corner."*

JAMES MCMULLAN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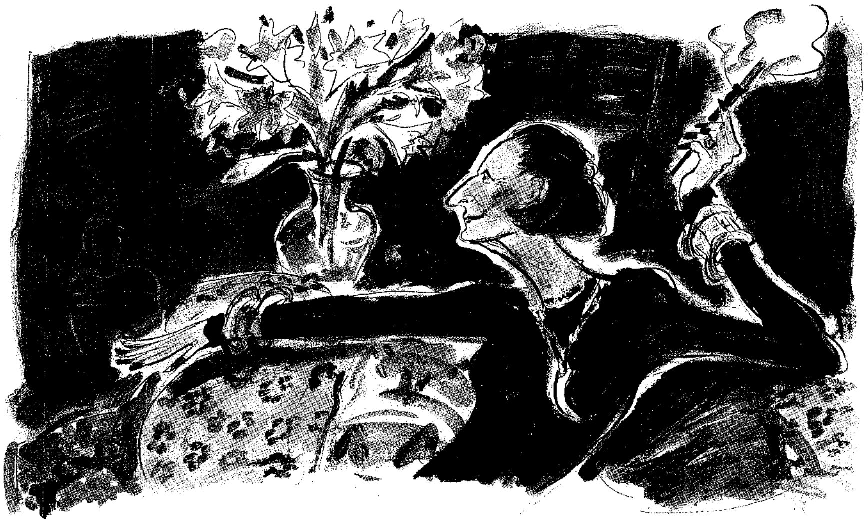
Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30. Through Oct. 25. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, near Houston St. 219-3088.)

**Company**—The Roundabout Theatre Company opens its thirtieth-anniversary season with a revival of Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's 1970 musical about marriage. Directed by Scott Ellis and choreographed by Rob Marshall. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

**Dangerous Corner**—David Mamet directs the Atlantic Theatre Company's production of J. B. Priestley's 1932 mystery, in which a family's dinner party turns sour when secrets are revealed. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

**A Doll's House**—Robin Leslie Brown plays Ibsen's songbird turned feminist, Michael Butler her dull and doting husband, in the Pearl Theatre Company's staging. It coasts along securely on traditional tracks, though it's jolted now and again by a chatty tone that seems unsuited to an Oslo drawing room of 1879. Grey Johnson directed. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Oct. 21.)



*Mary Louise Wilson, in "Full Gallop," at Manhattan Theatre Club.*

**Endgame**—Classic Stage Company's powerful revival of Samuel Beckett's 1957 play, in which four people—perhaps the only four left—live out their days in a world where "there are no more coffins" and not much of anything else, either. Kathleen Chalfant is superb as Clov, the servant: her precise yet indefinably odd body language echoes and amplifies Beckett's words. And John Seitz's performance as Hamm, the tyrant, is so canny that near the end, when he cries out, "The end is in the beginning, and yet you go on," you suspect that he once had a heart after all. Alan Manson and Irma St. Paule, in the smaller roles of Hamm's parents, are equally good. The sure-handed direction is by David Esbjornson, the company's artistic director. (136 E. 13th St. 677-4210. Closes Oct. 29.)

**The Food Chain**—In Nicky Silver's new play, the paths of five New Yorkers cross, hilariously. The situations are familiar and sitcomish, but the writing is tangy and memorably funny, and the actors—especially Hope Davis, as a dithery poet, and Phyllis Newman, as a long-suffering Jewish matron whose idea of listening is to talk—give smart, wonderfully fresh performances. Robert Falls directed. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/11/95.) (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

**Garden District**—Circle in the Square inaugurates its forty-fifth-anniversary season with two one-acts by Tennessee Williams ("Something Unspoken," starring Myra Carter and Pamela Payton-Wright and directed by Theodore Mann, and "Suddenly Last Summer," starring Elizabeth Ashley and directed by Harold Scott), presented under the title of the original 1958 double bill. (50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

**Having Our Say**—Bessie Delany (who died in September) and Sadie Delany, two sisters who passed the hundred-year mark, presented their vivid life stories in a 1993 best-seller; the book has been adapted beautifully by Emily Mann, who also directed. Gloria Foster and Mary Alice are brilliant as the sisters, who were taught by their family to "reach high" despite the dogging of Jim Crow. (4/24/95) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

**How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying**—In this revival of Frank Loesser's 1961 musical, Matthew Broderick has polish and timing, but it's Lillias White's gospel solo in "Brotherhood of Man" that lifts the audience into a zone of joy. (4/24/95) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

**Hunting Humans**—This production of Richard Thompson's dark comedy, about four men who bond at a friend's funeral, was recently seen at Edinburgh's Festival Fringe. Closes Oct. 28. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 473-4473.)

**If This Isn't Love**—Sidney Morris's comedy, which follows a pair of gay lovers from their teens to their forties, in a revival of the Glines' original 1982 staging. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 924-1198. Closes Oct. 29.)

**Indiscretions**—This production of Jean Cocteau's "Les Parents Terribles," a dark comedy about the perversities of desire in family life, is marred by Kathleen Turner's unfocussed performance. Roger Rees, Dana Ivey, Cynthia Nixon, and Jude Law also star, under the direction of Sean Mathias. (5/15/95) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

**Jean Cocteau Repertory**—Presenting "Nathan the Wise," Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1779 drama, in repertory with a solid production of Samuel Beckett's modernist classic "Waiting for Godot." (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

**Mathew in the School of Life**—An angelic android who has been created to absorb the suffering of the world is at the center of this wonderfully disjointed multimedia work, a collaboration by composer John Moran, director Bob McGrath, and the Ridge Theatre. Moran's eerie, meditative score—a collection of music, dialogue, and sampled sound—perfectly suits the otherworldly mood of the celestial-mission-control set. Since the show, which draws on such disparate sources as children's educational programs, theme-park automaton productions, and science-fiction movies, seems to revel in its antinarrative design, it's remarkable that the performances are so coherent and the cumulative effect so lyrical. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Closes Oct. 29.)

**Moon Over Buffalo**—Carol Burnett and Philip Bosco star in Ken Ludwig's new comedy as husband-and-wife actors playing Buffalo with a touring company. Tom Moore is the director. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

**Moonlight**—Jason Robards, Blythe Danner, and Paul Hecht lead the cast in the Roundabout's production of Harold Pinter's latest play. Directed by Karel Reisz. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

**Moscow Stations**—From London, a limited-run production starring Tom Courtenay. Adapted by Stephen Mulrine from the 1980 novel by Venedikt Yerofeev. Ian Brown, of Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, directed. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

**Nixon's Nixon**—Gerry Bamman is the title character and Steve Mellor is Henry Kissinger in Russell Lees's new play, set in the White House during a secret meeting on the night before the President's resignation. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes Oct. 22.)

**Party**—In David Dillon's comedy, seven gay men get together to play a strip version of truth or dare, with terrifically funny (if occasionally didactic) results. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.)

**Patti LuPone on Broadway**—The musical-theatre star, in a concert production. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

**Salome**—Steven Berkoff's minimalist interpretation of Oscar Wilde's "Salome," in which he stars as King Herod, continues through Oct. 21. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100.)

**Signature Theatre Company**—The company opens its fifth season—which consists of seven plays by Adrienne Kennedy—with revivals of two one-acts, "Funnyhouse of a Negro" (1964; directed by Caroline Jackson Smith) and "A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White" (1976; directed by Joseph Chaikin), both of which explore the relationship of black people to a largely white society. Ms. Kennedy has genuine insight but filters it through opaque, overly poetic scripts, so that even though the acting in both shows is superb, the knowledge that the characters acquire so painfully has to rise through a lot of murk. Perhaps that's part of the point, but there are better ways of making it. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Oct. 22.)

**Sin**—Kelly Coffield plays an aerial traffic reporter, in a comedy by Wendy MacLeod. Directed by David Petrarca. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103.)

**Sylvia**—A dog named Sylvia (Jan Hooks) brings meaning to the life of a middle-aged currency trader (John Cunningham) while driving a canine-shaped wedge between him and his wife (Mary Beth Peil). A. R. Gurney's comedy, directed by John Tillinger, lacks bite. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

**Tallahassee**—The new collaboration between playwrights Len Jenkin and Mac Wellman is a modern take on Ovid's Metamorphoses, set to music by Jim Ragland and Elise Morris. (Workhouse Theatre, 41 White St. 431-9220. Closes Oct. 28.)

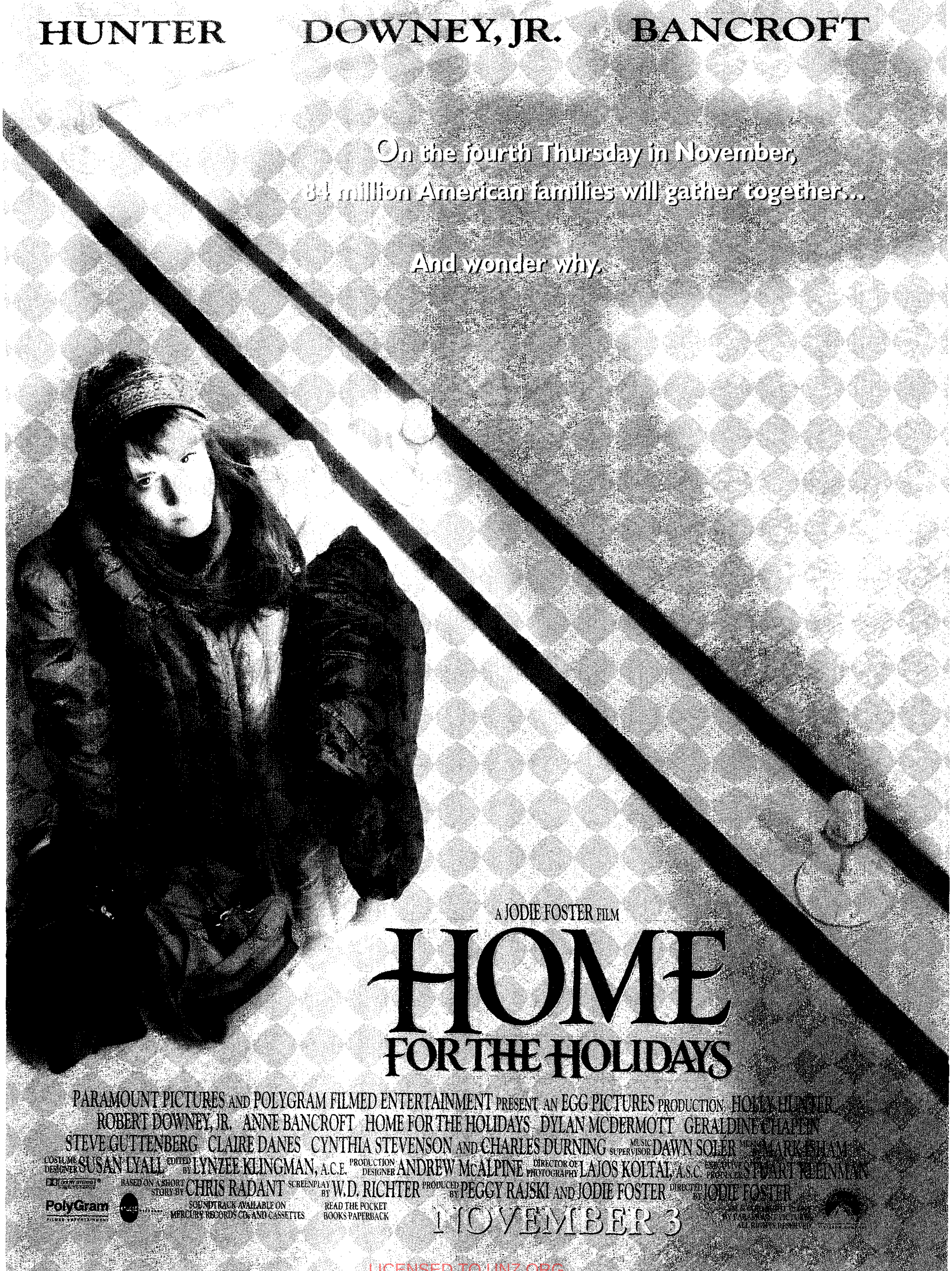
**Too Jewish?**—Avi Hoffman sets about reviving Yiddish in this mixture of songs and stories. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

**Two, Nikita**—A suspense comedy by Jeffrey Hatcher, set in 1959, in which a citizen of the Soviet Union tries to defect to the United States while Nikita Khrushchev is here visiting. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 627-7292. Closes Oct. 29.)

**What Ever**—Heather Woodbury brings her eight-part solo serial, in which she plays ten major characters and more than ninety minor ones, back to P.S. 122. Directed by Dudley Saunders. Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30. Through Oct. 28. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

**What You Said**—The improv company Chicago City Limits presents its latest revue,

BEATA SZPURA



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**Young Playwrights Festival**—Presenting "Guyworld," by Bret LaGree; "The King," by Denise Ruiz; "Proof Through the Night," by Clarence Coo; and "This Is About a Boy's Fears," by Shaun Neblett. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Oct. 29.)

### LONG RUNS

**AFTER-PLAY:** Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DEATH DEFYING ACTS:** Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE HEIRESS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ—THE SONGS OF LEIBER AND STOLLER:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **SWINGTIME CANTEEN:** Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200.

## DANCE

**Paul Taylor Dance Company**—Oct. 18 at 8: "Funny Papers," "Musical Offering," and "Offenbach Overtures." . . . ¶ Oct. 19 at 8: "Roses," "Company B," and "Esplanade." . . . ¶ Oct. 20 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 2: "Cloven Kingdom," "Musical Offering," and "Offenbach Overtures." . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 8 and Oct. 22 at 3: "Arden Court," "Funny Papers," and "Speaking in Tongues." . . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 7:30: "Cloven Kingdom," "Company B," and "Offenbach Overtures." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

**"Nine Songs"**—The Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, from Taiwan, performs a cycle of eleven dances ("nine" can also mean "many" in Chinese) based on ritual verses written by Qu Yuang during his banishment from the court of the Qin dynasty, in the third century B.C. The set, by Ming Cho Lee, features a lotus pond. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Oct. 18 at 7 and Oct. 20-21 at 8.)

**Maria Benitez Teatro Flamenco**—The Santa Fe-based company appears in "El Amor Brujo," a flamenco version (set to the Manuel de Falla ballet score) of an Andalusian Gypsy tale about a scorned lover's sorcery. The performance closes with a series of eight shorter dances. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Oct. 18-21 and Oct. 24 at 8, and Oct. 22 at 2 and 7:30. Through Oct. 29.)

**"Bingo Bizarre"**—The Danspace Project toasts its twenty-second season with an untitled solo by Ralph Lemon; excerpts from Iréne Hultman's work in progress, "Cascade"; and "approaching no calm," a duet by David Dorfman on the themes of intimacy and forgiveness, with Dorfman and the gracefully topsy-turvy Lisa Race. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Oct. 21 at 7:30.)

**Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble**—The Ailey touring company performs two works choreographed by its late founder ("Isba" and "Escapades") and two by Danial Shapiro and Joanie Smith ("To Have and to Hold" and "Three Dances with Army Blankets"). (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. 1-718 760-0064. Oct. 21 at 8 and Oct. 22 at 3.)

**"Purush: Male Tradition in Indian Dance"**—Five performers demonstrate four classical styles: sixty-year-old C. V. Chandrasekhar and sixteen-year-old Keerthik Nair (Bharatanatyam); Arjun Misra (Kathak); Sasidharan Nair (Kathakali); and Pasumarthy Vithal (Kuchipudi). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Oct. 22 at 7.)

**Doris Humphrey Centennial**—The Denishawn dancer and early modern-dance choreographer would have been a hundred on October 17. Her works, typified by the interplay of gravity and adventurous gesture in movements of controlled falling, will be discussed and performed at two centennial celebrations this week. Oct. 18-21 at 8: Four evenings of revivals, preceded by lectures from Humphrey-influenced choreographers. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715.) . . . ¶ Oct. 21-22: A conference (with panels, workshops, and classes) that includes three performances (Oct. 21 at 6 and 8:30, and Oct. 22 at 2) of Humphrey's work, ranging from "Valse Caprice" (1919) to "Day on Earth" (1947). (La Guardia High School, 64th St. and Amsterdam Ave. For information about the performances, call 924-0077; for information about the conference, at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th St., at Broadway, call 678-3328.)

*Man . . . or Astro-Man?, at Maxwell's and the Mercury Lounge.*

DUPUY-BERBERIAN

**The Tamburitzans of Duquesne University**—The thirty-five dancers, singers, and instrumentalists perform a program of traditional Eastern European steps, including flirtatious polkas from Nowy Sacz, Moldovan laundry-girl dances, and stick dances for Hungarian shepherds. (Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St. 879-8893. Oct. 21 at 8.)

## NIGHT LIFE

### CONCERTS

**Cabaret Convention**—Performances three through five of a five-night show-tunes-and-standards blowout. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. Oct. 18 at 6, Oct. 20 at 6, and Oct. 22 at 3. 840-2824.)

**Rusted Root / Joan Osborne**—A world-music jug band from the wilds of Pennsylvania which claims to play "rhythmic truth." That may be something of a stretch, but they do have a good beat, and they're easy to dance to. / This radiant singer-songwriter from Kentucky is a late bloomer: she didn't release her first album, "Soul Show" (1991), until she was almost thirty. Now she's making up for lost time. Her barn-burning rasp has been compared to Bonnie Raitt's, and her knack for finding profundity in humdrum themes suggests Bruce Springsteen. On her latest record, "Relish," she reconciles divine imagery and worldly pleasures—not bad for a woman who discovered her calling during a drunken open-mike session at a bar. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 18-19 at 8.)

**Ray Davies**—As long as he has a songwriting bone in his body (and he and his brother Dave don't kill each other), there will always be a Ray Davies. Far more influential than he's usually given credit for (even Pete Townshend admits he stole from the Kinks), this irrepressible Rock and Roll Hall of Famer should be as incorrigible as ever. (Academy, 234 W. 43rd St. 307-7171. Oct. 19 at 8.)

**Elton John**—In the early seventies, his records were filled with gorgeous melodies and theatrical arrangements—part art rock, part Tin Pan Alley, part blue-eyed soul—and his image was pure flamboyance. Later, after he ditched the rhinestone goggles and the feather boa, he contracted what might be called the Steve Winwood syndrome, mellowing into a tasteful yuppie icon. His new record, "Made in America," features some of the best writing he and his longtime collaborator, Bernie Taupin, have done in years. And, as anyone who's seen him live will tell you, the king of schmalz is still a dazzling performer. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. Oct. 19-20 at 8.)

**Kitaro**—Long before the phrase "New Age" was ever spoken, Kitaro was numbing the masses with his lush keyboard soundscapes. Recently his appeal has been overshadowed by such unlikely interlopers as Yanni and Enya, but he still looks good in a cape. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 20 at 8.)

**Sonic Youth**—A curious thing happened on this past summer's Lollapalooza tour: whenever the headlining granddaddies of alternative rock plugged in, half the crowd bolted. But the truth of the matter is that, with nary a single and little in the way of hooks or power chords, Sonic Youth consistently blew away the competition. The pioneering New York art-rock quartet has spent the past decade and a half sculpting, perfecting, and fine-tuning (and every other kind

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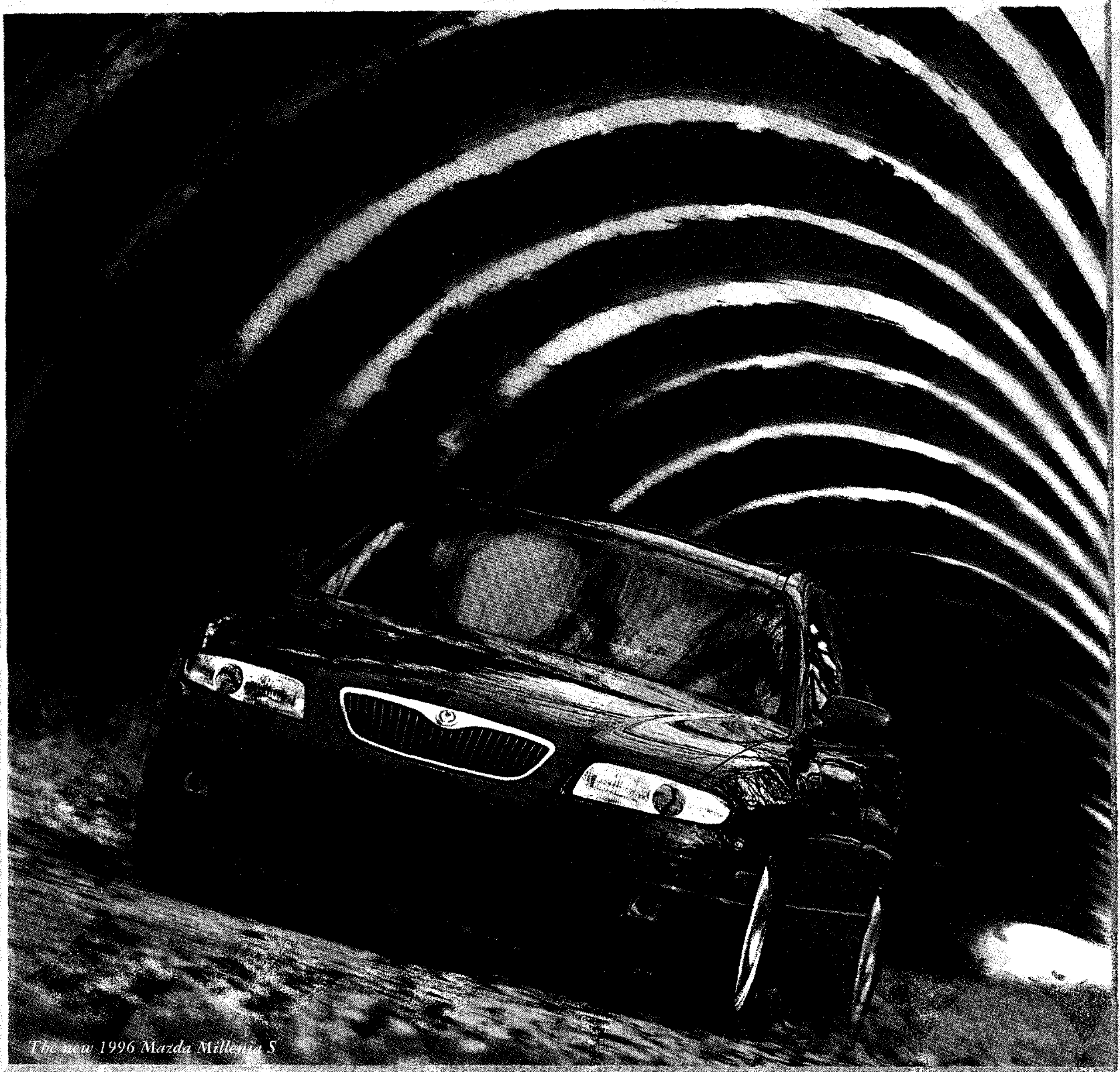

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of tuning) a majestic, shimmering wall of guitar noise. Recorded in Memphis, the band's twelfth album, "Washing Machine," is far more atmospheric and abstract than their last few releases; it veers from corrosive and explosive to beautiful and damaged, sometimes all in the same song. (Academy. Oct. 20 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 2 and 8.)

**Terumasa Hino**—The trumpeter, in a program called "Jazz from Japan." (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. 752-3015. Oct. 20-21 at 8.)

**The New Lost City Ramblers**—Led by Mike Seeger, these acoustic revivalists started out in the late fifties with the noble purpose of preserving American hillbilly and blues music from the first two decades of this century. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Oct. 21 at 3.)

**Duke Ellington Orchestra**—Conducted by Mercer Ellington, with guest vocalist Maureen McGovern. (Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 1-718 951-4500. Oct. 21 at 8.)

**String Band Festival**—Featuring the New Lost City Ramblers, Andy Statman's American Band, and the Du-Tels, with former Captain Beefheart conspirator Gary Lucas. (Symphony Space. Oct. 21 at 8.)

**Steely Dan**—At the height of their success in the seventies, the Dan were a lot closer in spirit to a consortium than to a rock band. Songwriters Donald Fagen and Walter Becker spent most of their time in the studio, agonizing over every nuance with a rotating cast of session musicians. Their notorious perfectionism, like their antipathy to live performance, became the stuff of music-business legend. Two summers ago, occasioned by nothing, Fagen and Becker embarked on their first tour in nineteen years. The resulting live album, "Alive in America," is a far cry from the grandeur of "Aja" (1977), but in the flesh Steely Dan is like something reanimated after years in amber: slow-moving, unsure of the local customs, potentially dangerous. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Oct. 21-22 at 8.)

**Shirley Bassey**—The British star of the booming voice and the haughty stance had a few big hits back in the sixties (the brassy "Goldfinger," from 1964, was the biggest). Listening to those records today makes you really appreciate Al Jolson. Still, there remains something winning about her; like Liberace, she'll always be theatrical, and her fans will always love her. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 24 at 8.)

## CLUBS

*(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)*

**Bottom Line,** 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Oct. 21: The **ROCHES.** Maggie, Terre, and Suzzy return once again, with their inimitable blend of swooping, alien harmonies, unrequited-love songs, and whimsy. A New York institution. Oct. 24: **LEO KOTTKE.** One of the most adventurous six- and twelve-string players around, Kottke has been making great acoustic-guitar records since the seventies. The influence of his astounding technique and pure, ringing tone can be heard in the work of such diverse musicians as Michael Hedges and David Lindley.

**Brownies,** 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Oct. 20: **CHAVEZ,** a kind of indie-rock supergroup, featuring former members of Live Skull and Bullet LaVolta. "Gone Glimmering," the band's very cool début on the very cool Matador Records, is one of the gems of 1995, but Chavez is best heard live—its canny, artful intensity provides arena-sized bliss. Oct. 23: **MARK EITZEL.** The singer and songwriter remains one of the finest poets of tenderloin passion and despair since Tom Waits. Though his Bay Area band, American Music Club, is no more, his solo gigs share its unfashionable and eccentric sound. **JIM LAUDERDALE** (Oct. 24) has a little bit of Roger Miller-style mischief in his soul, but his carefully crafted, slightly surreal confections are far from novelty numbers. His new album, "Every Second Counts," continues the wonderful journey he started in 1991 with "Planet of Love."

**Chicago B.L.U.E.S.,** 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Oct. 20-21: Guitarist **JAMES COTTON** gets the blues.

**Continental Divide,** 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, punks, poseurs, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. Live music nightly.

**The Cooler,** 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel vault deep in the heart of the meat district. Tuesday nights are given over to experimental d.j. spinoffs.

**Don Hill's,** 511 Greenwich St. (219-2850)—A tidy little SoHo bar with an above-average P.A. system and topnotch local bands on the docket. Friday night is Squeeze Box, a vinyl-and-velvet gay glamfest.

**Duplex,** 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **DRESSING ROOM DIVAS** entertain every Friday night.

**Fez,** 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—**JANE SIBERRY** begins the first of two three-night residencies on Oct. 23. A recently transplanted Canadian treasure whose fans include such disparate heavyweights as Brian Eno and k.d. lang, Siberry has been languishing in near-obscurity for the past fifteen years, making challenging art-school pop and enduring endless comparisons to Kate Bush and Laurie Anderson. She's a far better songwriter, and a truly charming, guileless performer. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

**Irving Plaza,** 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Oct. 17-18: Reggae great **BURNING SPEAR.** . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

**Latin Quarter,** 2551 Broadway, at 96th St. (864-7600)—A second-story dance hall with frosted-glass doors, floral-print carpet, fourteen video monitors, and a salsa band sweating onstage every Thursday through Saturday.

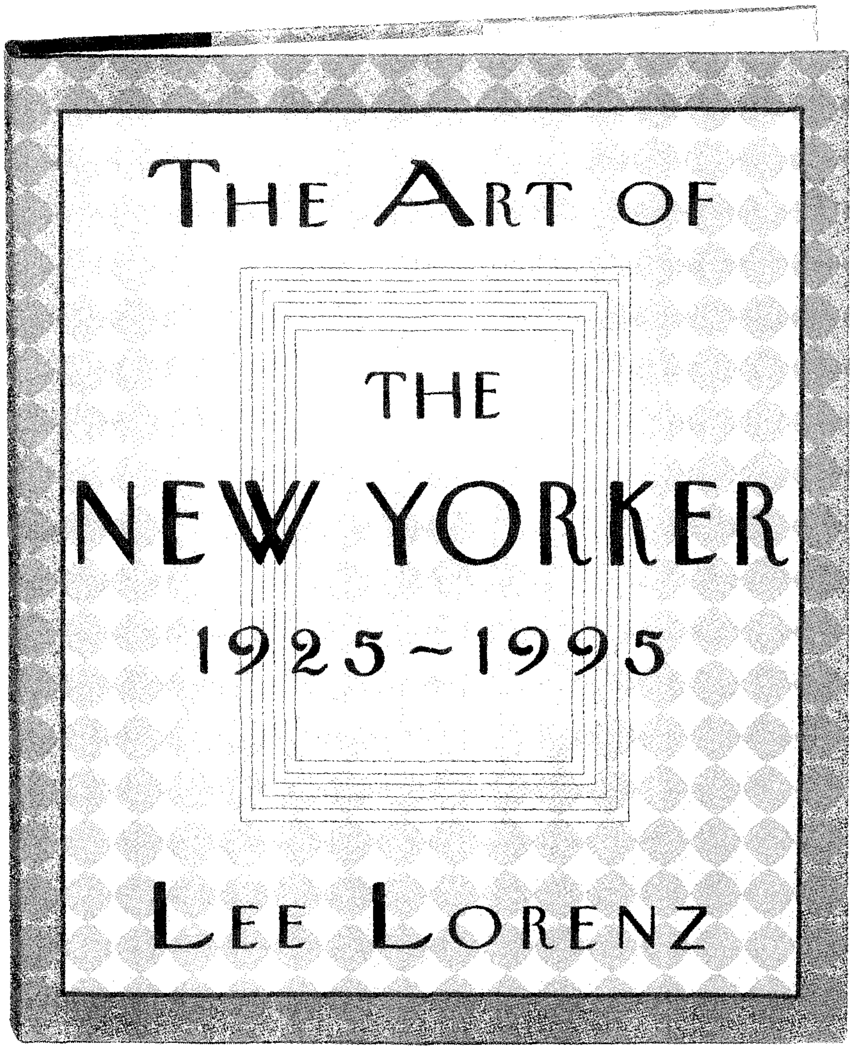
**Maxwell's,** 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—Oct. 20: **COMBUSTIBLE EDISON.** The first band to feature a signature drink recipe (two ounces brandy, one ounce Campari, one ounce fresh lemon juice; ignite brandy, pour into a shaker full of cracked ice, etc.) on its CD cover, Combustible Edison is the most convincing of the new cocktail-lounge sophisticates. The band's music is a kitschy libation consisting of equal parts vibraphone, Farfisa organ, melodica, bossa-nova bongos, surf guitar (played by a besuited James Bond type called the Millionaire), and torchy vocals (courtesy of Miss Lily Banquette). Oct. 21: **MAN . . . OR ASTRO-MAN?** (See Mercury Lounge.)

**Mercury Lounge,** 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Oct. 20: **MAN . . . OR ASTRO-MAN?** These space-age stowaways from Alabama play lo-fi surf punctuated with sci-fi samples from the fifties; they are rumored to be touring with a theremin and a six-foot-tall tesla coil. Drag racing, double agents, and interplanetary travel are among the many issues addressed in their instrumentals.

**S.O.B.'s,** 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Oct. 18: **GILL SCOTT-HERON.** In the seventies, while many of his R. & B. peers were blissfully succumbing to disco fever, this singer-pianist (who's also a poet and a novelist) was fusing jazz and funk textures with sobering political rap—which makes "Spirits," his first album in twelve years, a potent, timely return. **GATO BARBIERI** begins a three-night stand on Oct. 24. Dining.

**Supper Club,** 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—Boston hunk oddity **JONATHAN RICHMAN** will

DUPUY-BERBERIAN



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Told by Lee Lorenz, the magazine's art editor for two decades
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preach to the converted on Oct. 24. Richman's songs, stories, and bare chest—should he deign to dispense with his shirt—are proud and fascinating assets, and no other rocker around can reap such enchantment from the mundane.

**Tramps,** 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Oct. 18: **JOE GRUSHECKY & THE HOUSEROCKERS.** The new album by the blue-collar Pittsburgh rocker was produced by some guy named Springsteen. The show was sold out about four seconds after it was announced. You figure it out. Oct. 20: Often hailed as the world's greatest bar band, **NRBQ** often lives up to the hype. There just isn't another outfit with such a mastery of virtually every American popular-music idiom, from rockabilly and blues to jazz and swing. Oct. 21: **THROWING MUSES.** Former member Tanya Donelly may get all the attention for her own group, Belly, but the Muses' gripping record, "University," far surpasses those of Belly and of most other alternative-rock poster children in potency and inventiveness. Led for more than ten tumultuous years by the pixieish singer Kristin Hersh, the Muses shift between guitar mayhem and swirling, otherworldly realms.

**Wetlands,** 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Oct. 19: One of the great bar bands of all time, **SIMON AND THE BAR SINISTERS.** Oct. 20: Cocktail hardcore with **BLACK VELVET FLAG.** Oct. 21: A multiculti evening, featuring master drummer **BABA OLATUNJI** and his Drums of Passion, and **YOSSI PIAMENTA,** the Hasidic Hendrix.

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**Algonquin Hotel,** 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Tangy-voiced singer **WESLIA WHITFIELD** (through Oct. 21) interprets the American popular canon with an understated, intelligent spin. Her early set features songs by Harry Warren and Victor Young, and in her late one she does selections from her aptly titled new CD, "Nice Work." **ANDREA MARCOVICCI** takes over on Oct. 24. Dining.

**Blue Note,** 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Oct. 22: harpist **ANDREAS VOLLENWEIDER.** Former "Arsenio" bandleader **MICHAEL WOLFF** drops in for a night on Oct. 23. **LIONEL HAMPTON** stops by on Oct. 24. Dining.

**Carlyle Hotel,** Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through New Year's Eve, the great **BOBBY SHORT.** Time has not diminished the tasteful virtuosity of Short's ivory-tinkling, nor has it taken the edge off his gregarious wit as a singer and showman. A fixture at the Carlyle, he can still spin an Ira Gershwin lyric with all the sophistication, humor, and pathos it deserves. Also well served are gems by Duke Ellington, Dorothy Fields, Irving Berlin, and, of course, Cole Porter. A de-lightful, de-lovely evening. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

**Danny's Skylight Room,** 346 W. 46th St. (265-8130)—Vocalist Paula West performs on Oct. 23.

**Iridium,** 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Oct. 22: the **JIMMY HEATH** big band. The inestimable composer and saxophonist is also one of the great unsung bandleaders. His large ensembles showcase his melodic writing, his ear for tonal color, and his innate understanding of the way horns, brass, and rhythm can be made to sing together. Dining.

**Knitting Factory,** 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 20-24: Guitarist **JAMES (BLOOD) ULMER** and his Music Revelation ensemble.

**Match,** 160 Mercer St. (343-0020)—This hip SoHo *boîte* is the place to be every Sunday night, thanks to the **SHORTY JACKSON LEGACY BLUES BAND,** featuring the eighty-nine-year-old **LAUREL WATSON.** Dining.

**Rainbow & Stars,** 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—Vocalist **AMANDA MC BROOM,** in the midst of a four-week run, brings her warm heart to the great cabaret in the sky. Closed Mondays.

**Sweet Basil,** 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Oct. 22: the **BENNY GOLSON** quartet. Boasting a brawny tone, full-throttle energy, and impeccable credentials, tenor saxophonist Golson is a genuine hard-bop hero. He's has at least three jazz classics to his name: "I Remember Clifford," "Whisper Not," and "Stablemates." Dining.

## TABLES FOR TWO

*Dining around town*

**Aureole,** 34 E. 61st St. (319-1660)—Set in a fine old East Side brownstone that Orson Welles once lived in, Aureole is a gastronomic theatre that reserves its most flamboyant surprises until just before the final curtain. As you arrive, you can see the evening ahead as if in a diorama: the front of the restaurant is a dramatic two-story window. It must be a bitch to clean, but it's worth the trouble, because it lightens up an interior that is, for such a high-flying place, a little cramped and dowdy.

The superb young chef and owner, Charles Palmer, works wonders with everything from sea scallops (sandwiched inside a crust of shredded potatoes) to lobster (wood-grilled, with truffle oil) to quail (seared, with a pudding of sweetbreads and polenta). The menu sounds fussier than it is; while nearly every dish is original and they're all cooked just right, that university-of-food hauteur is missing—Mr. Palmer does not demand that you rise and applaud. (You may want to, though.)

At Aureole, only the foolish go through the ritual of "I'll just have berries for dessert." This is the place to let loose. Nearly all of pastry chef Dan Rundell's desserts are fanciful Tinkertoy constructions—great vertical flares of sweet stuff held together by golden threads of spun sugar—and they're bliss. The Anjou-pear crisp, which comes with a cone of white-chocolate ice cream, looks like a mobile that you could hang from the ceiling; sorbet arrives stacked by color, like a pousse-café. No doubt Orson Welles would have found these flourishes worthy of a curtain call. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner only. Prix fixe, $63; tasting menu, $85.)

**Tatou,** 151 E. 50th St. (753-1144)—Vocalist **LAINIE KAZAN** is currently appearing. Dining.

**Tavern on the Green,** Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—Through Oct. 22: **MARGARET WHITING,** a no-business-like-show-business gal with a cheerful, life-affirming voice. Dining.

**Village Vanguard,** 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Oct. 22: the **PHAROAH SANDERS** quartet. Sanders has actually mellowed over the years; his sonic maelstroms are now regularly tempered by his soulful ballads. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

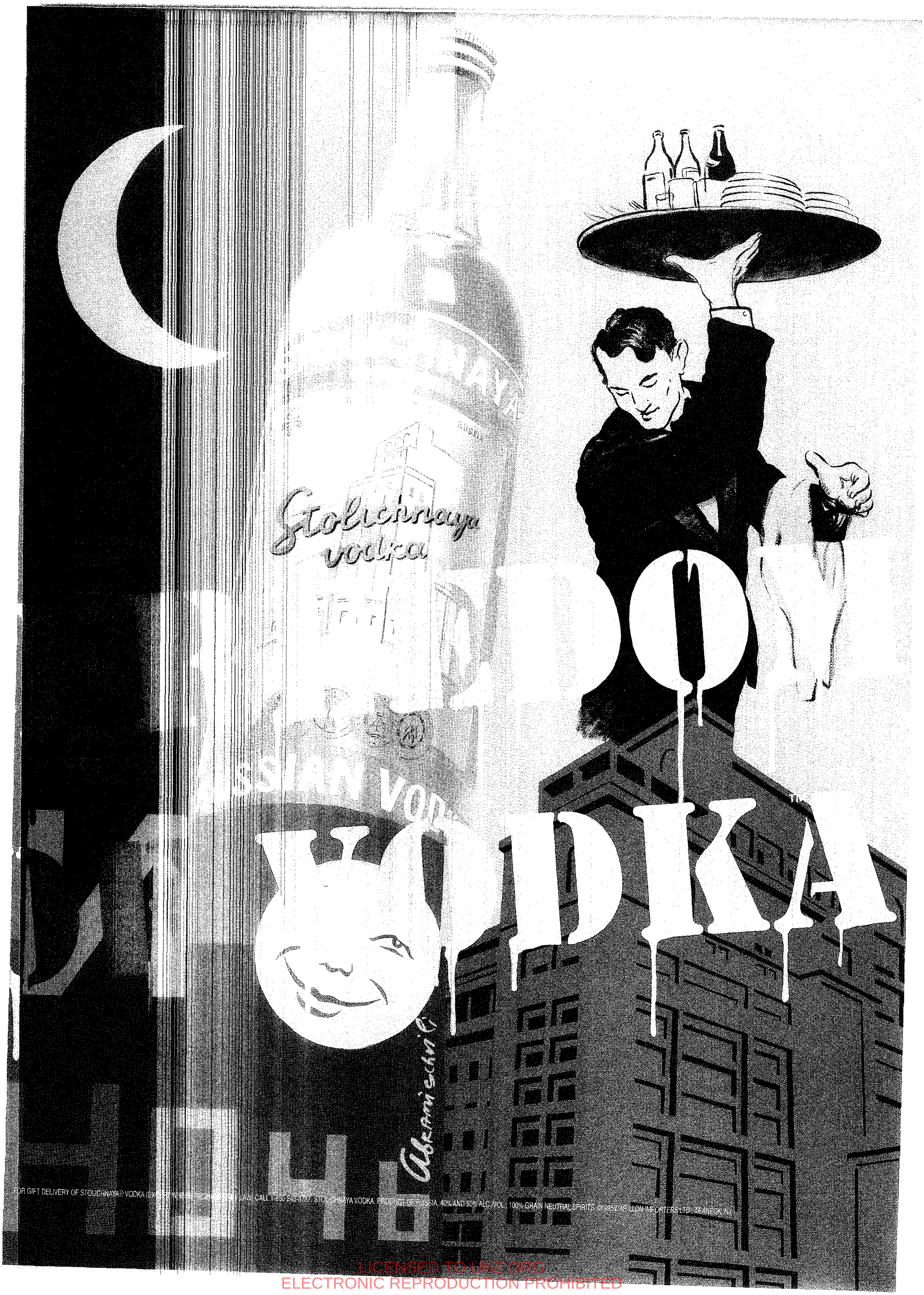
# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**Metropolitan Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—Since the beginning of this century, scholarly and scientific analyses have cut the number of paintings believed to be authentic Rembrandts in half—from six hundred and fifty to around three hundred. "Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt," an exhibition displaying fifty-five paintings from the museum's collection by Rembrandt, his pupils, and emulators of his style, along with a selection of drawings and prints, explores these changes in attribution. Through Jan. 7. . . . ¶ "John Singleton Copley in America," seventy-five portraits of affluent Bostonians and New Yorkers, done before the artist packed up for London in 1775. Through Jan. 7. . . . ¶ "Goya in the Metropolitan Museum of Art" handsomely assembles all of the museum's Goya holdings—long a cornerstone of its collection. Most of the works are prints, the medium in which the artist expressed himself most boldly. The final gallery offers a side-by-side comparison of the two "Majas on a Balcony": an unquestionably authentic painting on loan from a private collector, and the Met's version, whose authenticity has recently been challenged. The Met's majas are looking rather wan. Through Dec. 31. . . . ¶ "Pages of Perfection," Islamic art from the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, is remarkable not only for its rare early examples of Muslim calligraphy (dating as far back as the eighth century) but also for a group of late, decadent miniatures that imitate Western painting. Through Dec. 10. . . . ¶ Trenchcoats, epaulets, tartans, aviator glasses, khaki, and many other elements of civilian dress were recruited from the militaries of the world. "Swords Into Ploughshares," in the Costume Institute, offers a hundred outfits and a host of visual links between the wardrobes of the warrior and leisure classes. Through Nov. 26. . . . **NOTE:** The museum's roof garden is open, when weather permits, until Oct. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

**Museum of Modern Art,** 11 W. 53rd St.—"Piet Mondrian: 1872-1944," which comes to New York from The Hague, via Washington, D.C., is a medium-sized blockbuster, with a hundred and sixty paintings and drawings, close to half of them from the thirties and forties. The MOMA installation has a few exclusives: "Broadway Boogie Woogie" and the unfinished "Victory Boogie Woogie," and a re-creation of the artist's last studio, at 15 E. 59th St. Through Jan. 23. . . . ¶ "Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George," ninety-three photographs taken at Stieglitz's upstate retreat, most of them from the twenties and thirties. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ Uta Barth, Joseph Bartscherer, Ulrich Görlich, and Eric Rondepierre have contributed new photographs and site-specific installations to "New Photography 11." Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Light Construction" examines, through models, large photographs, and drawings, the concepts of transparency and translucency in contemporary architecture. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ A small show of works from the seventies to the present by the French Conceptualist Annette Messager, who combines photographed, painted, and drawn images with found and constructed objects and text. Through Jan. 16. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

**Guggenheim Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology" features more than two hundred of the Popster's hard and soft sculptures, collages, and drawings for existing large-scale projects and proposed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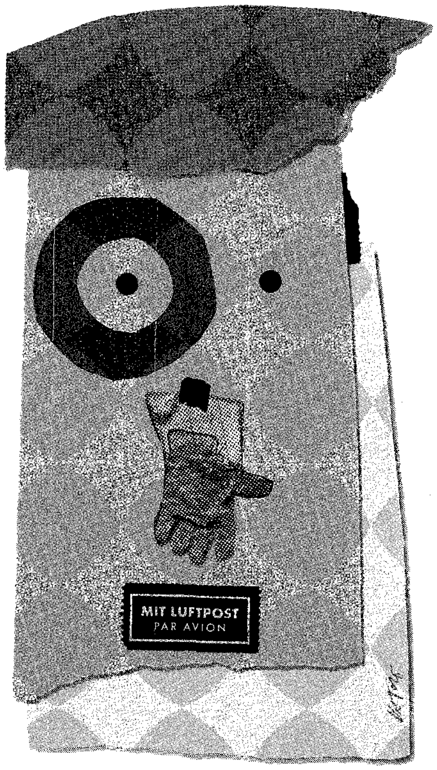
colossal monuments. Through Jan. 21.... ¶ "Joel-Peter Witkin," a mid-career retrospective of the photographer's astonishing and horrifying œuvre. Through Jan. 14. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

**Guggenheim Museum SoHo,** 575 Broadway—Fluorescent-light sculptures from 1963 to 1987 by Dan Flavin. Through Nov. 30.... ¶ A survey of the conceptual photography of Dieter Appelt, supplemented by sculptural objects made by the artist for inclusion in these images. Through Nov. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

**Whitney Museum of American Art,** Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica." Through Nov. 5.... ¶ A show titled "Picassoid" examines, in the works of American artists, the influence of three phases of Picasso's career: Cubism, Classicism, and Surrealism. Through Dec. 10. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

**American Museum of Natural History,** Central Park W. at 79th St.—A hundred and forty botanical watercolors, illustrations, engravings, and lithographs are on view; a third of them are of orchids. Among the artists represented are Pierre-Joseph Redouté, Margaret Mee, Marilena Pistoia, and Georg Dionys Ehret.... ¶ The skeletons of some one hundred saurischian and ornithischian dinosaurs have been cleaned and repositioned, and they're waiting for you. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)



*Ivan Chermayeff, at the School of Visual Arts.*

**Brooklyn Museum,** Eastern Parkway—"A Slice of Schiaparelli: Surrealism in Fashion." Fifty examples of the stylish inspirations of Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973): evening gloves with reptilian scales; a day suit with metallic ladybugs, grasshoppers, and cockroaches creeping across it; a hat of celluloid grapes; and more. Starts Oct. 20.... ¶ "Leon Polk Smith: American Painter," a retrospective of large geometrical abstractions, most of them on oddly shaped canvases, by an eighty-nine-year-old artist who was inspired sixty years ago by his first sight of a Mondrian. Through Jan. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**Dia Center for the Arts,** 548 W. 22nd St.—"European Couples, and Others," a selection of the minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin's work from 1964 to 1978, all drawn from Dia's own collection. Thirty years ago, nothing could match the simplicity and radicalism of Flavin's reliance on a limited variety of commercially available light fixtures and colors to generate seemingly limitless variations; today his art is a cornerstone of the institutionalized avant-garde. These fluorescent-light sculptures appear to extraordinary advantage in Dia's antiseptic space. Most of them inhabit corners after the manner of Russian avant-garde works by the likes of Malevich and Tatlin; their glow dematerializes the plain geometry of the architecture, rendering their surroundings sensuous and atmospheric.... ¶ "Your Skin in This Weather Bourne Eye—Threads & Swollen Perfume" is the laboriously poetic title of Jessica Stockholder's rambling, ramshackle installation, which utilizes (among *many* other things) hot-pink carpet, lime-green linoleum, purple milk crates, and a tumescent heap of stuffed shirts. The artist has cut out part of one wall to reveal storage space, thereby incorporating the institutional infrastructure in a way that is witty yet predictable. Indeed, the calculated outrageousness begins to make Stockholder's visual high jinks seem like assemblage in more ways than one; surveying her vast, nutty pile, one picks out elements reminiscent of such diverse artists as Michael Asher, Eva Hesse, Gordon Matta-Clark, Ellsworth Kelly, and Judy Pfaff.... ¶ "Atlas," Gerhard Richter's gargantuan, superbly enigmatic collection of (mainly) photographs. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

**Jewish Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change, 1890-1990," a large exhibition of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and graphic works by fifty artists, including Eric Bulatov, Léon Bakst, Marc Chagall, Ilya Kabokov, El Lissitzky, and Komar & Melamid. Through Jan. 28. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

**Morgan Library,** 29 E. 36th St.—"Fantasy and Reality: Drawings from the Sunny Crawford von Bülow Collection." This small, tightly focussed collection was begun by the socialite who fell ill in 1980 under famously mysterious circumstances, and has been continued by her daughter Cosima. The forty-six pieces on exhibit form a delightful sequence of little masterworks from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mostly by French and Italian draftsmen. Among the standouts are two Ingres pencil portraits, one of a boy in a revolutionary bonnet, the other of a surly young man in ill health; an ebullient red-chalk "Temple of Diana," by Watteau; and a very amusing Nicolas Hüet watercolor, "Study of the Giraffe Given to Charles X by the Viceroy of Egypt, 1827," depicting a then world-famous beast (it prompted a craze for girafferie in France) and its dozing Egyptian keeper. Through Jan. 7.... ¶ "From Jackson to Lincoln: Democracy and Dissent," a helping of Americana—including letters, manuscripts, books, and drawings—from the Gilder Lehrman Collection. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

**National Academy of Design,** Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg: Landscapes of the Mind." A feast of paintings, drawings, and prints from the Norwegian turn-of-the-century masters. Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5:30; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

**The New Museum,** 583 Broadway—"Temporarily Possessed," an exhibit drawn from the museum's semi-permanent collection (works that are retained for ten to twenty years). Among the artists are Dennis Adams, Ida Applebroog, Bob Flanagan, Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine, Nancy Spero, and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Through Dec. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

*(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)*

**Marcel Broodthaers** (1924-76)—"Section Publicité," the final chapter of the Belgian Conceptualist's "Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles," a project that had been a major preoccupation of his. This segment presents two-dimensional images of eagles, in photocollages, slide projections, and vitrines. Through Nov. 25. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.... ¶ A show of the artist's posters and books is at Gibson, 568 Broadway, through Nov. 11.)

**Emlen Etting** (1905-91)—A show of works on paper by a well-known illustrator of the forties and fifties. Military themes are the focus, but it's a far cry from "The Naked and the Dead": Etting lavishes affectionate, even prurient attention on his men in uniform, many of whom he depicts in various stages of dishabille. Through Dec. 31. (Stubbs Books & Prints, 153 E. 70th St.)

**Janet Fish**—Bravura paintings of glass objects in domestic settings. Fish's superrealism, which has become free and painterly, works especially well in the large canvases with human figures: a children's pool party, a dinner at home. Through Oct. 28. (Borgenicht, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

**Marisol / Altoon Sultan**—The most famous female Pop sculptor with one name takes on the Old West: a fat cavalryman on his fat horse sits malevolently in the middle of the gallery, surrounded by cute, cuddly Indian chiefs with big headdresses. For better or worse, the artist's wooden collage sculptures haven't changed a jot in thirty years. / Cool, meticulous paintings of farms in New England. Through Oct. 21. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St.)

**Jane Wilson**—Vivid landscapes, in oil, by a New York-based artist. Through Nov. 11. (Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St.)

**"Early Mondrian"**—An extensive selection of the artist's early paintings, drawings, and watercolors, which reminds us how very Dutch he was. There are Rembrandtesque (sort of) landscapes with windmills, interior scenes that echo de Hooch, drawings of chrysanthemums which have all the perfumed elegance of lowland Baroque flower studies. The early geometric compositions sprinkled here and there shine with an incandescent purity that is muted in the current MOMA exhibit by repetitiveness. Through Dec. 2. (Janis, 110 W. 57th St.)

**"From Left to Right: Social Realism in Germany and Russia, Circa 1919-33"**—A museum-quality exhibit of prints, drawings, and posters which sets works of social-realist art and propaganda from Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia side by side, to devastating effect. Although there are some famous names here (Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Käthe Kollwitz), the forgotten poster artists have the most powerful impact. Nearly identical cartoons of the Western powers being smashed—in one case by Nazism, in the other by Communism—form a damning indictment of both those isms. Through Nov. 4. (St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St.)

**"Referencing Mondrian No. 1"**—Paintings from the thirties and forties by Ilya Bolotowsky, Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glarner, Harry Holtzman, and Charmion von Wiegand. Through Nov. 18. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St.)

**Short List—JAMES LEE BYARS,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays; through Oct. 21.... **LESLEY DILL,** George Adams, 50 W. 57th St. Through Oct. 28.... **HELEN FRANKENTHALER,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Through Nov. 4.... **DUNCAN HANNAH,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through Nov. 11.... **GRACE KNOWLTON,** Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. Through Nov. 4.... **ANNETTE LEMIEUX,** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through Nov. 16.... **IDA LORENTZEN,** Babcock, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through Nov. 11.... **CHRISTOPHER LUCAS,** Baldacci, 41 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 11.... **JOHN MARIN,** Kennedy, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through Nov. 4.... **FAITH RINGGOLD,** ACA, 41 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 4.... **STEPHEN WESTFALL** and **ALEXANDER LIBERMAN,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 4 and Oct. 28, respectively.

JAMES VICTORE

# ATTENTION

## Bouncers and Security Personnel

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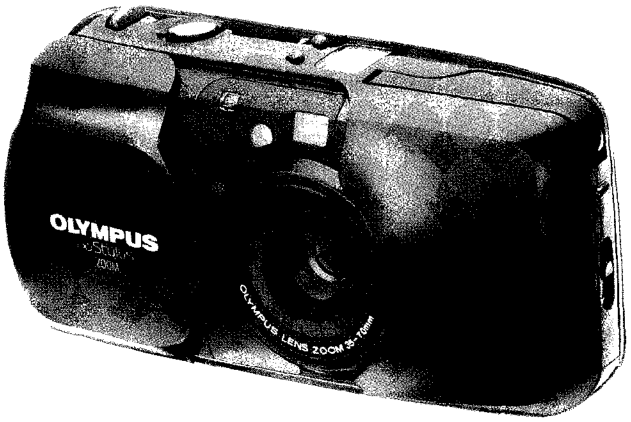

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### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**Kiki Smith**—A mighty impressive show. There are several body images—both human and animal, in wax, bronze, pewter, paper, and fibreglass—and some nonfigurative pieces as well. "Ice Man," an eight-foot-tall male form in translucent fibreglass, looms like an angel, high on the back wall. Twenty-seven cast-bronze sculptures of dead crows litter the floor, telling a story that fascinates us even though we don't know quite what it is. Through Oct. 21. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.)

**Chris Wilder**—"Chill Out," a multimedia installation by a young Los Angeles artist, consisting of aluminum-foil wallpaper, silver "paintings" made of Mylar and other materials, turquoise synthetic carpet, a fluffy white throw pillow, and scattered books. Ambient music contributes to the spacey lounge atmosphere. Through Oct. 21. (Merians, 76 Greene St.)

**"Pierced Hearts and True Love: A Century of Drawings for Tattoos"**—In addition to hundreds of contemporary drawings and historical flash, this show offers acetate stencils, photographs, tattoo-parlor signs, tools, and paraphernalia. Among the artists represented are Sailor Jerry Collins, Horiyoshi II, Stoney St. Clair, Dainty Dotty, and Charlie Malta. Through Nov. 11. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Open Wednesday evenings until 8.)

**"Raw"**—Paintings, drawings, and sculpture executed in casual or slapdash ways, by Polly Apfelbaum, David Diao, Sean Landers, Paul McCarthy, and others. Through Nov. 11. (Postmasters, 80 Greene St.)

**"Women on the Verge (Fluxus and Not)"**—A rumination on the reasons that recent examples of the sixties anti-movement are considered just Fluxus, and not neo- or post-, through works by Alison Knowles, Carolee Schneeman, Yoko Ono, Yayoi Kusama, Rona Pondick, and others. Through Oct. 21. (Wimmer, 560 Broadway.)

**Short List**—**CHUCK AGRO,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. Through Nov. 11. . . . **KEITH COVENTRY,** Marcus, 578 Broadway. Through Nov. 4. . . . **ANN CRAVEN,** Wittels, 580 Broadway. Through Nov. 11. . . . **NASSOS DAPHNIS,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway; also at Zarre, 48 Greene St. Through Nov. 4. . . . **DREW DOMINICK,** Freire, 580 Broadway. Through Nov. 11. . . . **MICHAEL FLANAGAN,** P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway. Through Nov. 11. . . . **ROBERT GUILLOT,** Shainman, 560 Broadway. Through Nov. 11. . . . **GLENN LIGON,** Protetch, 560 Broadway. Through Nov. 4. . . . **BRICE MARDEN,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6; through Jan. 14. . . . **CATHERINE MURPHY,** Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. Through Nov. 11. . . . **BARRY RATOFF,** Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6; through Nov. 8. . . . **ROBERT SMITHSON,** Markey, 55 Vandam St. Through Nov. 4.

### OTHER VENUES

**Ivan Chermayeff**—Work by a graphic artist whose repertoire also includes collage, sculpture, children's books, and wonderfully ornate annual reports. Through Oct. 20. (School of Visual Arts, 209 E. 23rd St.)

## PHOTOGRAPHY

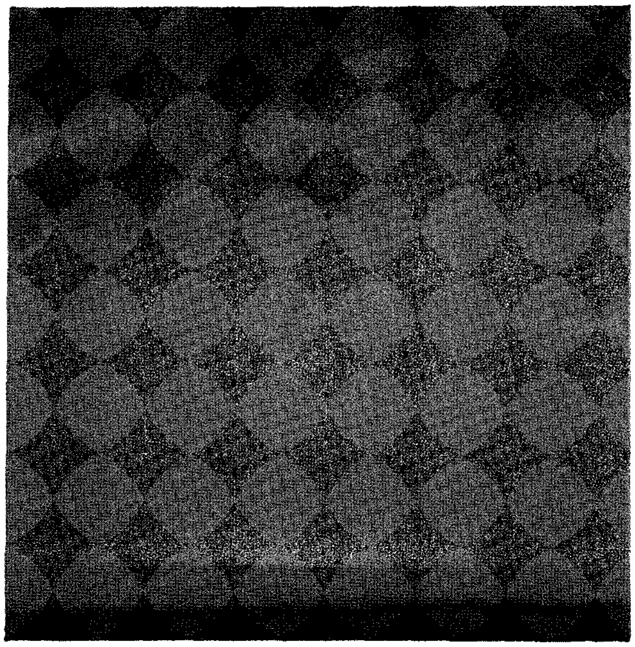
**Eugène Atget** (1857-1927) and **Walker Evans** (1903-75)—A dry, intermittently compelling exhibit of fifty works, with several very fine juxtapositions. The selection—of a few interiors and public sculptures, and many architectural studies and street scenes—suffers from a lack of variety, especially in the Atgets. But there is plenty of evidence of both artists' devotion to documentation, clarity, and directness. Through Nov. 25. (Zabriskie, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

**Bill Burke**—Black-and-white Polaroids, processed on the spot and often damaged by poor conditions, taken during trips to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. Through Nov. 4. (Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St.)

**Imogen Cunningham** (1883-1976)—A survey of her long, prolific career, including portraits, figures, landscapes, cityscapes, and flowers. Through Nov. 4. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St.)

**Sally Mann**—Recent photographs of the artist's family, in which the rural Virginia landscape assumes a prominent role. Through Nov. 4. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

**Richard Misrach / Harold Edgerton** (1903-90)—In the latest series from his desert explorations, Misrach looks up into the sky and comes away with expansive—sometimes riveting—fields of color. / "Acts of Destruction," the fascinating effects of arrows, bullets, hammers, and explosions on innocent balloons, playing cards, and telephone books. Both shows through Oct. 21. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)



*"Atlantic Morning," by Jane Wilson (Fischbach).*

**Tina Modotti** (1896-1942)—Street photographs, still-lifes with puppets, and other works made in Mexico between 1923 and 1929, which reveal a unique marriage of political consciousness and formalist aesthetics. Through Nov. 4. (Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St.)

**"Up/Down: Varied Viewpoints"**—The subject from above or below, by Kertész, Coburn, Strand, Abbott, Kuniyoshi, Callahan, and others. Through Nov. 30. (Seagram Building, 375 Park Ave., at 52nd St., fourth floor. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

**International Center of Photography,** 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St.—"Feeling the Spirit: Searching the World for the People of Africa," twenty years of photographs by *Times* staff photographer Chester Higgins, Jr. Through Jan. 8. . . . ¶ Street and prison scenes and images of violence in Bogotá, Colombia, by Bastienne Schmidt. Through Jan. 8. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

**International Center of Photography Midtown,** Sixth Ave. at 43rd St.—"The Garden of Earthly Delights: Photographs by Edward Weston and Robert Mapplethorpe." Still-lifes, nudes, and portraits, hung side by side in comparative groupings. Through Nov. 26. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

*(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum.)*

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

*(The box-office number for Avery Fisher Hall is 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for the Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St., 854-7799.)*

### OPERA

**Metropolitan Opera**—**CARMEN,** with Denyce Graves, Barbara Frittoli, Richard Margison, and Sergei Leiferkus; conducted by John Fiore. (Oct. 18 at 8 and Oct. 21 at 1.) . . . **DON GIOVANNI,** with Carolyn James, Carol Vaness, Hei-Kyung Hong, Frank Lopardo, Thomas Hampson, and John Cheek; Daniel Beckwith. (Oct. 19 at 8.) . . . With Sharon Sweet instead of Ms. James. (Oct. 21 and Oct. 24 at 8.) . . . **AIDA,** with Nina Rautio, Dolora Zajick, Kristján Jóhannsson, and Timothy Noble; Christian Badea. (Oct. 20 at 8.) . . . With Andrea Gruber, Ms. Zajick, Michael Sylvester, and Mr. Noble; Mr. Badea. (Oct. 23 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

**New York City Opera**—Opening performances of the first American production of **KINKAKUJI,** with music by Toshiro Mayuzumi and libretto by Claus Henneberg (after Mishima's novel "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion." (Oct. 19 and Oct. 24 at 8.) . . . **LA BOHÈME.** (Oct. 20 at 8.) . . . **CARMEN.** (Oct. 21 at 1:30.) . . . **TURANDOT.** (Oct. 21 at 8.) . . . **THE MAGIC FLUTE,** performed in English. (Oct. 22 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

**Amato Opera Company**—Presenting the opening performances of its production of "Don Giovanni." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Oct. 21 at 7:30 and Oct. 22 at 2:30. Through Nov. 19.)

### ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**New York Philharmonic**—At Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 19-21 at 8: John Mauceri conducts music for the concert stage and for the big screen—and there will be a big screen over the stage—by Miklós Rózsa and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, two Central European émigrés who found success in Hollywood. The concert works—Korngold's "Symphonic Serenade" and Rózsa's "Theme, Variations and Finale"—share the bill with excerpts from notable motion-picture scores, during which film sequences will be screened: the "Archery Contest" and "Sword Fight Finale" from "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (Warner Bros., 1938, with a swashbuckling score by Korngold); the "Great Waltz" from "Madame Bovary" (M-G-M, 1949, with music by Rózsa); and three sequences from "Ben-Hur" (M-G-M, 1959, set to another Rózsa score). . . . **NOTE:** Pre-concert lectures begin each night at 7.

**Juilliard Orchestra**—Gerard Schwarz conducts David Diamond's Symphony No. 1 and "The Enormous Room," Janáček's Sinfonietta, and Prokofiev's Sinfonia Concertante (with cellist Ani Aznavoorian). (Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 18 at 8.)

**Boston Symphony**—Seiji Ozawa conducts Tippett's "The Rose Lake," Sibelius's Violin Concerto (with Leila Josefowicz), and a suite from Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet." (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 18-19 at 8.)

**Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal**—At Carnegie Hall, Charles Dutoit conducting. Oct. 21 at 8: Berlioz's "Les Francs Juges" Overture, Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Yefim Bronfman), Chausson's Symphony in B-Flat Major, and Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole." . . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 3: Berlioz's "King Lear" Overture, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Louis Lortie), Martinů's Symphony No. 5, and Enesco's "Romanian Rhapsody No. 1."

**Richard Tucker Gala**—The annual showcase of vocal talent turns the spotlight on this year's Tucker Award recipient, tenor Paul Groves, as well as on sopranos Hildegard Behrens, Renée Fleming, Denyce Graves, and Carol Vaness; mezzo-soprano Dolora Zajick; tenor Kristján Jóhansson; and baritones Dmitri Hvorostovsky

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and Sherrill Milnes (among others). Steven Mercurio conducts members of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the New York Choral Society. (Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 22 at 6.)

**Jupiter Symphony**—Jens Nygaard conducts Mozart's Symphony No. 36 (the "Linz") and G-Major Piano Concerto (K. 453, with Claude Frank). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Oct. 23 at 2 and 7 and Oct. 24 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

## RECITALS

**St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble**—Performing Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, Dohnányi's C-Major Serenade for String Trio, and Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" (with actor Anthony Heald narrating). (Weill Recital Hall. Oct. 18 at 8.)

**Truls Mørk**—Cellist, with pianist Artur Pizzaro, performing works by Shostakovich, Brahms, and others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Oct. 22 at 3.)

**Kent Tritle**—The organist performs works by Buxtehude, Bach (his C-Minor Passacaglia and Fugue), Reger, Liszt, Messiaen, Dupré, and Franck (his Chorale No. 2). (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Oct. 18 at 8.)

**Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center**—In the opening concerts of its twenty-seventh season, the society presents Vivaldi's A-Minor Concerto for Two Violins (Op. 3, No. 8), Mozart's C-Major String Quintet, Corigliano's "Soliloquy" for clarinet and strings, and Mendelssohn's Octet. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Oct. 20 at 8 and Oct. 22 at 5.)

**Christopher Taylor**—This pianist made headlines two summers ago by becoming the first American to win a medal at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, in Fort Worth, since 1981 (when contestants from the United States swept the top five spots). He took third place, but what was extraordinary about his achievement was that he performed works that are widely considered competition anathema—Bach's "Goldberg" Variations (too long), a section of Messiaen's "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus" (too unfamiliar), and Boulez's Sonata No. 2 (way, *way* too modernist). In this "four Bs" concert, he performs the Boulez work (one of the most notoriously difficult keyboard pieces written since the Second World War) as well as Bach's D-Minor Chaconne (arranged by Brahms for the left hand alone) and Beethoven's C-Minor Sonata (Op. 111). (Miller Theatre. Oct. 19 at 8.)

**New York Philomusica**—The ensemble offers Beethoven's C-Major Cello Sonata (Op. 102, No. 1) and piano quartets by Turina and Brahms (in C Minor). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. Oct. 19 at 8.)

**Borromeo String Quartet**—The foursome plays Schubert's G-Major Quartet (D. 887) and C-Major String Quintet (with cellist Peter Wiley). (Weill Recital Hall. Oct. 20 at 8.)

**Anne-Lise Berntsen**—Soprano, in a program of songs by the Norwegian composers Johan Kvandal and Lasse Thoresen, as well as several by Mahler and Mussorgsky; with pianist Pamela Pyle. (National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 369-4880. Oct. 20 at 8.)

**Island Sunday**—Mordechai Rechtman conducts his arrangement for large chamber ensemble of Brahms's A-Major Serenade. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. Oct. 22 at noon.)

**Salon Soirées**—Violist Ori Kam and pianist Liran Avni play Brahms's two viola sonatas. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Oct. 22 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

**American Symphony Orchestra Chamber Players**—In performances of music by Mendelssohn, Ernst Bloch, and James Rothstein, members of the orchestra explore Jewish musical life under the Third Reich. (Merkin Concert Hall. Oct. 22 at 7.)

**Guillermo Figueroa**—The principal violinist of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra surveys the violin music of Bartók: his Solo Violin Sonata and his two Sonatas for Violin and Piano (with Robert Koenig assisting). (Miller Theatre. Oct. 22 at 7:30. . . . **NOTE:** At 6:45, Mr. Figueroa and Peter Bartók, the composer's son, will speak about the works on the program.)

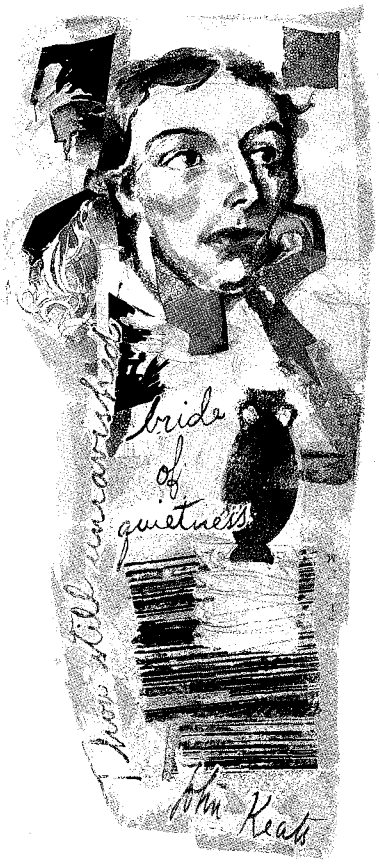
**Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, and Graham Johnson**—Johnson, the English "collaborative pianist" whose encyclopedic repertoire has shaped the Songmaker's Almanac (a model vocal-chamber-music ensemble) mans the keyboard for this duo recital by two longtime Almanac constituents. Lott exudes good humor, generosity, and a sense of grateful bemusement at her tremendous popularity. Murray's dusky mezzo is the perfect foil for Lott's pure, more mature soprano, and her wry sarcasm, intensified by a no-nonsense Dublin accent, gives it grit. Their program, with luscious duets by Mendelssohn, Brahms, and the French *mélodistes*, looks standard enough, but these two leaven their recitals with heaping spoonfuls of risibility; in Rossini's famous "Comic Duet for Two Cats," you can expect them to come off as a musical Lucy and Ethel. (Alice Tully Hall. Oct. 23 at 7.)

**St. Lawrence String Quartet**—The Canadian ensemble performs Mozart's "Hunt" Quartet (K. 458), Fauré's "La Bonne Chanson" (with baritone Russell Braun and pianist Carolyn Maule), and Schumann's Quartet No. 1. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. Oct. 23 at 7. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

**Maurizio Pollini**—In the third installment of his seven-concert traversal of Beethoven's piano sonatas, the pianist performs the Sonatas in B-Flat Major (Op. 22), A-Flat Major (Op. 26), E-Flat Major (Op. 27, No. 1), C-Sharp Minor (Op. 27, No. 2, the "Moonlight"), and D Major (Op. 28). (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 23 at 7:30. The series then recesses until March.)

**Salute to Berio**—Soprano Christine Schadeberg and members of the Musicians' Accord contemporary-music ensemble celebrate Luciano Berio's seventieth birthday—to the day—with a program that includes his "Quattro Canzoni Popolari," "Opus Number Zoo," "Circles," and two of the Sequenzas (one for flute, the other for oboe). (Miller Theatre. Oct. 24 at 8.)

**Eugenia Zukerman and Anthony Newman**—The flutist and the harpsichordist present an evening of music and readings from the late Baroque era. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571. Oct. 24 at 6.)



*Keatsiana, at the Grolier Club.*

# ABOVE AND BEYOND

**Fled Is That Music**—The Grolier Club celebrates the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Keats (on Halloween, 1795) with an exhibition of his letters, fair copies of his poems, illustrated first editions, and such heartrending personal effects as a lock of his hair, an 1816 life mask, and a pen-and-ink portrait of the sleeping poet drawn by his friend John Severn during the bedside deathwatch in Rome (scrawled along the bottom: "a deadly sweat was on him all this night"). The letters are full of nineteenth-century devices: in one, to his brothers, Keats wrote in two overlapping directions (twice as much writing for the same postage); in another, to his sister-in-law, he included a twenty-one-line poem whose initial letters spell out "Georgiana Augusta Keats." (47 E. 60th St. Through Nov. 22.)

**Grand March of the Dachshunds**—The Dachshund Friendship Club invites all wiener dogs and their friends to march around the fountain in Washington Square Park this Saturday, Oct. 21, at noon. The highlight of the annual event comes when the assembled dogs—last year, almost a thousand—are hoisted toward the arch on the arms of their cheering human companions. For more information, call Adrian Milton at 475-5512.

**People Watching**—City Lore (a.k.a. the New York Center for Urban Folk Culture) will induct seven New Yorkers into the People's Hall of Fame on Wednesday. The inductees, most of whom will perform at the ceremonies, include Morris Adler and Zypora Spaisman, of the Yiddish Folkbiene Playhouse; Virginia Hall, who leads quilting circles in Bedford-Stuyvesant; Louis Mofsie, the director of the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers; Armando Sánchez, bandleader and master of *son*, the Cuban forerunner of salsa; Mark D. Moss, the director of the folk-music magazine *Sing Out!*; and Tony Spina, the proprietor of Tannen's, the world's largest magic shop. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Oct. 18 at 6. For more information, call 529-1955.)

**Readings**—Oct. 19 at 6:30: Colum McCann reads from his first novel, "Songdogs." (Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, 1 Washington Mews. 998-3950.) . . . ¶ Oct. 20 at 7: Short-story writer Pam Houston will read from her work. (West Side Y, 5 W. 63rd St. Tickets at the door on the evening of the reading.) . . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 3: Poets Kurt Brown, Laure-Anne Bosselaar, Grace Schulman, and Brooks Haxton read from their work. (Civic Center Synagogue, 49 White St. Tickets at the door on the afternoon of the reading.) . . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 8: Carlos Fuentes reads from his most recent novel, "Diana: The Goddess Who Hunts Alone." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

**Talks**—Oct. 18 at 6: Librarian Alison Ryley plucks cookbooks from the shelves of the New York Public Library's culinary collection. (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For reservations, call the Culinary Historians of New York, at 1-203 629-4653.) . . . ¶ Oct. 19 at 6:15: Landscape designer Julie Moir Messervy shows slides of private gardens and public parks designed for solitude and contemplation. (Horticultural Society of New York, 128 W. 58th St. For more information, call 1-718 817-8747.) . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 7: At "Dagoes, Reds, and Aliens," attorney Robert Meeropol and novelist Anthony Valerio, with activists Ruben Quiroz and Gil Fagiani, among others, mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti. (Fashion Industries High School, 225 W. 24th St. For more information, call Juliet Ucelli at 643-8490.)

**Tour**—Oct. 22 at 3:30: Howard Goldberg of Adventures on a Shoestring distributes cake and sings "Happy Birthday" to the George Washington Bridge in his annual tour of the fourteen-lane vehicular span that Le Corbusier called "the only seat of grace in the disordered city." For more information, call 265-2663.

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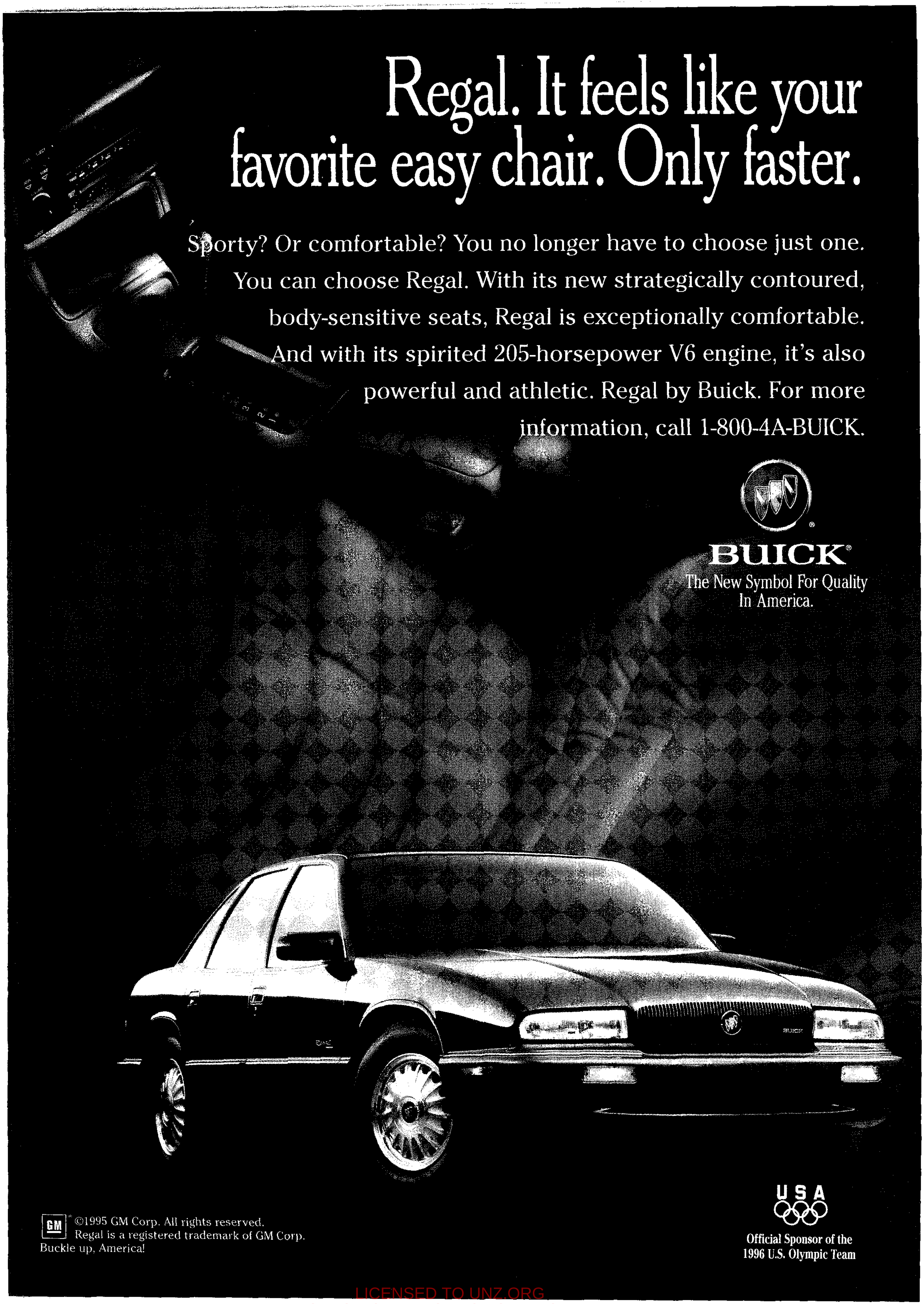

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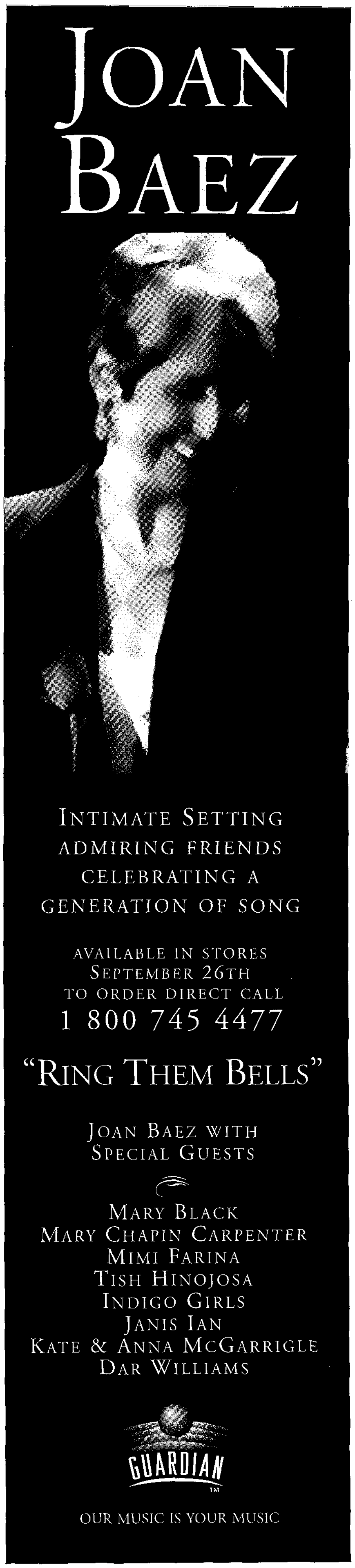
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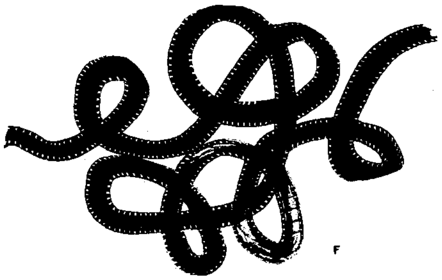
# THE MOVIES



## FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

**Get Shorty**—Barry Sonnenfeld's film version of Elmore Leonard's 1990 novel, with John Travolta, Gene Hackman, Rene Russo, and Danny DeVito. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) Opening October 20. (34th Street Showplace, Baronet, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Mallrats**—A comedy written and directed by Kevin Smith ("Clerks"), about teen-agers in New Jersey. With Shannen Doherty, Jeremy London, and Jason Lee. Opening October 20. (Village Theatre VII, First & 62nd Cinemas, 23rd St. West Triplex, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

**Les Misérables**—Jean-Paul Belmondo stars in Claude Lelouch's adaptation of Victor Hugo's 1862 novel, updated to the Nazi occupation of France. In French. Opening October 20. (Lincoln Square.)

**Never Talk to Strangers**—A criminal psychologist (Rebecca De Mornay) assigned to investigate a series of murders falls in love with a mysterious stranger (Antonio Banderas), in a thriller directed by Peter Hall. With Dennis Miller, Harry Dean Stanton, and Len Cariou. Opening October 20. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Now and Then**—Four young girls (Christina Ricci, Thora Birch, Gaby Hoffmann, and Ashleigh Aston Moore) spend an eventful summer together in 1970, then help each other as adults (Rosie O'Donnell, Melanie Griffith, Demi Moore, and Rita Wilson) two decades later, in a comedy directed by Lesli Linka Glatter and written by I. Marlene King. Opening October 20. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Talk**—An Australian day-in-the-life drama directed by Susan Lambert, about two friends and co-workers (Angie Milliken and Victoria Longley) who are envious of each other's lives. Written by Jan Cornall. Opening October 20. (Quad Cinema.)

## CURRENT FILMS

*(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 31.)*

**The Addiction**—Abel Ferrara has made some interestingly lousy movies ("King of New York," "Bad Lieutenant"); this one is just plain lousy. Another black-and-white vampire film with a female bloodsucker (Lili Taylor—wasted, in more ways than one), it wants to be a sombre thesis on the banality of evil, and brings in My Lai, Nazi atrocities, and junkie night life to illustrate its points. The dialogue, filled with academic buzzwords and solemn proclamations, is too staid and dreary to be laughable. The actors, including Annabella Sciorra and Christopher Walken, are posed beautifully for maximum noir effect, in lacy shadows and dark alleys (the picture was shot in the neighborhood of New York University), but the blood has been drained out of their performances.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

**Assassins**—What made Richard Donner's "Lethal Weapon" movies so enjoyable was the over-the-top hysteria of the action scenes. Here Donner goes for a more subdued, artistic pitch, and though the film is well crafted it's a rather drab thriller. Sylvester Stallone plays a hit man who wants to retire (he broods nicely), Antonio Banderas is his up-and-coming rival, and Julianne Moore is a surveillance expert who loves her cat and spies on her neighbors. The plot concerns a computer disk that she is selling, but it's just an excuse for everyone to pick up guns and start shooting. (Since this is an art film, silencers are used most of the time.) A cool languor develops between Stallone and Moore, and Banderas gives a cackling, exuberant performance, but the glum, pensive mood never lifts.—B.D. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Augustin**—An intriguing if rather clinical French comedy. Jean-Chrétien Sibertin-Blanc plays the title character, a Portuguese-French clerk who catalogues brain deaths for an insurance company and acts in his spare time (his biggest roles to date have been in an insecticide commercial and a wretched-sounding play called "Better Off Deaf"). Augustin is perfectly functional but virtually autistic in his misreading of the emotional tenor of every situation he gets into: he laughs when he should be serious and gives a hilariously dry, affectless audition for the role of an enraged cuckold. Stripped of all sentimentality, he's a modern clown—never aware, not even for a moment, of his loneliness. Written and directed by Anne Fontaine. In French.—S.K. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**Black Is . . . Black Ain't**—The late Marlon Riggs's final documentary, about African-American identity, includes interviews with Cornel West, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, and Bill T. Jones. (Film Forum 1; through Oct. 24.)

**Blue in the Face**—Harvey Keitel reprises his role from "Smoke," as the owner of a Brooklyn cigar store, in a comedy directed by Wayne Wang and Paul Auster, with an ensemble cast that includes Michael J. Fox, Jim Jarmusch, Madonna, Lou Reed, Roseanne, and Lily Tomlin. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Angelika Film Center, Sutton, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**Clockers**—The new Spike Lee picture is adapted from the 1992 thriller by Richard Price (the two collaborated on the screenplay), but thrills are low on the agenda of this nervy, knowing tale. The clockers of the title—low-grade crack dealers who work the Brooklyn projects at all hours—belong to the only successful business in the neighborhood. Harvey Keitel plays a tired racist cop, and newcomer Mekhi Phifer a black kid suspected of murder, but neither of them is used as a star: instead Lee has built an ensemble piece to bring a small world onto the screen. Though he still can't resist a fancy visual trick from time to time, "Clockers" is, in its compound of the jaunty and the depressing, his ripest work to date.—A.L. (9/18/95) (Manhattan Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, Metro Cinema, and National Twin.)

**Dead Presidents**—Albert and Allen Hughes's first film, "Menace II Society," was an exciting blast of ghetto life, loaded with edgy humor that masked a deeper, more thoughtful despair. Their new picture—about a young black man's journey from the Bronx to Vietnam and back again—is an ambitious misfire. In the early scenes, which introduce the main character (Larenz Tate) and his friends and family, the Hugheses find a natural humor and a soulful rhythm. Then the friends ship off to Vietnam, are hardened by the insanity they live through there, return to an America that offers them little opportunity, and turn to crime. Although the movie is disjointed, the filmmakers pull off some bravura sequences (the armored-car robbery at the end is spectacular), and they know how to get a scene moving and build on it with a Scorsese-like sweep. Tate, Keith David, and Bokeem Woodbine put a great deal of heart into their performances, but because the characters are little more than types, the film turns into one more indict-the-system polemic with little emotional pull.—B.D. (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Sutton, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, and Embassy 2.)

*Linda Fiorentino and David Caruso in "Jade."*

HERVE BLANDON

**Devil in a Blue Dress**—Denzel Washington plays Easy Rawlins, the hero of Walter Mosley's popular detective novels. The action takes place in 1948; Easy, an unemployed veteran, reluctantly agrees to help a shady-looking white man (Tom Sizemore) locate a woman who may be lying low in one of L.A.'s black neighborhoods. The movie, written and directed by Carl Franklin ("One False Move"), is the most enjoyable private-eye film in a long time: a modest, skillful, unfussy genre piece that tells an exciting story and lets its more serious concerns remain just below the surface. Also with Jennifer Beals and Don Cheadle (who does a virtuoso comic turn as Easy's homicidal sidekick, Mouse).—T.R. (10/2/95) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin.)

**Feast of July**—When a small-town couple (Tom Bell and Gemma Jones) give refuge to a woman (Embeth Davidtz) whose lover has abandoned her, their three sons vie for her favor, in a drama set in late-nineteenth-century England. Directed by Christopher Menaul. Adapted by Christopher Neame from the 1954 novel by H. E. Bates. (68th St. Playhouse and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Village East Cinemas; starting Oct. 20.)

**How to Make an American Quilt**—Winona Ryder plays Finn, a graduate student who spends the summer at the rural California home of her grandmother (Ellen Burstyn) and her great-aunt (Anne Bancroft), interviewing members of a quilting circle for her thesis and deciding whether to marry her down-to-earth boyfriend. The movie grew out of a real-life master's thesis (by Whitney Otto) that became a best-seller, and it still feels heavier on concept than on story. The characters represent possible paths of womanhood: there's a lonely widow (Kate Nelligan), a thwarted housewife (Lois Smith), a free spirit (Alfre Woodard)—everything but a lesbian. Saying that Ryder was born to play the self-conscious, narcissistic Finn is not exactly praise. Also with Maya Angelou. Script by Jane Anderson; directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse ("Proof").—S.K. (34th St. East, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Metro Cinema.)

**Jade**—A thriller about the murder of a San Francisco socialite, starring David Caruso, Chazz Palminteri, and Linda Fiorentino. Directed by William Friedkin. Written by Joe Eszterhas. (19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, East 85th Street, Waverly, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Astor Plaza.)

**Kicking and Screaming**—Noah Baumbach's first movie focusses on the indecisive, enervated months that four college buddies spend together after graduation, before they go their separate ways. What finally makes them move on, and sets this film apart from other slacker comedies, is the women they're attracted to: risk-taking students who are more capable than their men of standing on their own. Baumbach doesn't write grand speeches; he lets details and repartee carry the movie's emotional weight. The picture has a lovely, understated autobiographical lilt. The perfect ensemble cast includes Josh Hamilton, Olivia d'Abo, Parker Posey, and the reigning king of independent-film ennui, Eric Stoltz.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center.)

**A Month by the Lake**—The era is the nineteen-thirties. Vanessa Redgrave is amazing as Miss Bentley, a spinster photographer who has travelled to Lake Como to find love; the actress avoids all the repressed-schoolmarm clichés of the role and plays it as a loud, slightly infantile tomboy. Edward Fox is equally touching, and eccentric, as a lonely major. Trevor Bentham wrote the oddly suspenseful script, based on a novella by H. E. Bates; John Irvin directed. Also with Uma Thurman.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas and Plaza. . . . ¶ Gotham Cinema; through Oct. 19.)

**Moonlight and Valentino**—The weepie is as archetypal a genre as the Western. There isn't much new in this story of a young poetry professor (Elizabeth Perkins) who calls on her ex-stepmother (Kathleen Turner), best friend (Whoopi Goldberg), and little sister (Gwyneth Paltrow) for comfort when her husband goes out jogging and gets flattened by a car, but at least everyone connected with the production is topnotch. Paltrow stands out as a confused bohemian virgin, and Jon Bon Jovi is surprisingly good as the soulful-eyed housepainter who brings Perkins' heart back from the dead. Ellen Simon adapted the script from her play; David Anspaugh directed.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas and Tower East.)

**Persuasion**—The young British director Roger Michell has made a Jane Austen movie that is never pretty and only occasionally charming; instead, it is troubled, astringent, and

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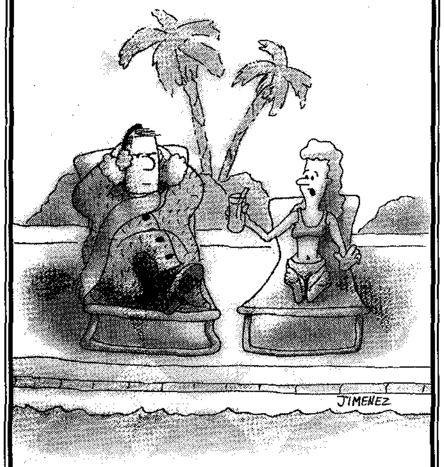

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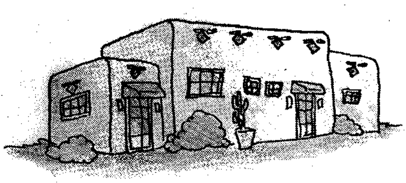

touched with melancholy—not unlike the novel. Amanda Root plays Anne Elliot, who once turned down Frederick Wentworth (Ciaran Hinds) and has regretted it ever since. They come together again—in the country, by the sea, and on the streets of Bath—and you can guess the outcome, but Michell somehow tenses a simple narrative into suspense. With Sophie Thompson as Anne's sister, Corin Redgrave as their monstrous father, and Fiona Shaw as the worldly wife of an admiral.—A.L. (9/25/95) (Paris.)

**The Scarlet Letter**—Roland Joffé directs Douglas Day Stewart's adaptation of Hawthorne's masterpiece. The cast includes Demi Moore, Gary Oldman, and Robert Duvall. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Cinema I, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, and Lincoln Square.)

**Seven**—The murders in David Fincher's serial-killer mystery are grisly tableaux, each artfully arranged to illustrate one of the seven deadly sins. This kind of self-conscious literary conceit can work if it's handled with a light, parodic touch, but the movie's clammy design and glum cinematography try to persuade us that what we're watching is a serious meditation on the nature of evil. The police detectives are Morgan Freeman, as weary old Somerset, and Brad Pitt, as brash young Mills; Freeman, with his immense dignity and authority, manages to keep his head above water, but Pitt goes under.—T.R. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema II, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

**Showgirls**—Director Paul Verhoeven and screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, who last worked together on "Basic Instinct," tell the story of Nomi (Elizabeth Berkley), a young woman who goes to Las Vegas determined to climb the greasy pole of success. In an unusual career move, she ends up actually *licking* the pole—just one of the highlights of her dance routine at the Cheetah Club. We soon find her ascending to the heights of the Stardust, an altogether classier joint (dry ice, gold costumes), where she arouses the pleasant lust of Zack (Kyle MacLachlan) and the furious lust of Cristal (Gina Gershon); these days, no Eszterhas script is complete without a dash of wandering sexuality. He and Verhoeven are like a couple of kids sniggering at a peepshow on 42nd Street—their movie is full of *really* rude words, plus women without their tops on! Berkley's film-acting début is a joy, if you can call it acting: she jumps up and down a lot to indicate excitement. Watching this picture is like surfing the soaps for a couple of hours. There's no use being offended, so you might as well have a good laugh.—A.L. (10/9/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . ¶ Criterion Center; through Oct. 19.)

**Smoke**—Five years ago, the director Wayne Wang asked the novelist Paul Auster to work up one of his stories as a screenplay. The result—a highly cerebral intertwining of the lives of white and black characters in Brooklyn in 1990, centering on a cigar-store owner (Harvey Keitel) and a lonely writer (William Hurt)—is obviously a labor of love. But Wang's sentimentality and Auster's self-consciousness don't go together: the direction is literal, and the lines sound like short-story dialogue read aloud. Only Forest Whitaker, playing a guilty father, comes off well. A gorgeous sequence that runs behind the final credits—with no dialogue, just a song by Tom Waits—suggests what the film *might* have been. With Harold Perrineau, Jr., Stockard Channing, and Ashley Judd.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**Strange Days**—The year 2000 is hours away, the streets of Los Angeles are erupting with civil strife, and Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes) is up to his stubble in bad news. Lenny records lives—every feeling and sensation—on disk; it's a scummy business, and it suddenly gets worse when he receives a couple of disks that appear to show police racism, rape, and murder. (The movie is like a mad fantasia on the Rodney King episode.) Enlisting the help of Max (Tom Sizemore) and Mace (Angela Bassett), Lenny sets out to crack the case. But for the director, Kathryn Bigelow, the case is mainly an excuse to let it rip. This is her loudest, most rebellious movie to date: she has shifted away from the sleek manner of "Blue Steel" and "Point Break" and arrived at a relentlessly wired style. Inspired by her excess, some of the actors head straight over the top. The worst offender is Juliette Lewis, unwatchable in the role of Lenny's old girlfriend. But Fiennes holds steady; his moody, lonely performance, especially in the beguiling first half hour, lends the story an air of calm despair. Screenplay by James Cameron and Jay Cocks.—A.L. (10/9/95) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Beekman, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, and Regency.)

**To Die For**—Director Gus Van Sant's latest movie is his funniest, but also his least adventurous. Adapted by Buck Henry from Joyce Maynard's 1992 novel, it tells the story of Suzanne Stone (Nicole Kidman), a suburban nobody who, bored with her husband (Matt Dillon), decides to become a somebody in the world of television. She joins a local station, starts to shoot a documentary about three schoolkids, and gradually lures them into her web. The film is smartly structured, but Van Sant's touch is uncertain: the story's satirical bite begins to loosen as his camera lingers more and more on the plain, disaffected teen-agers. One of them is played by Joaquin Phoenix, whose brother River was so extraordinary in "My Own Private Idaho"; it's as though Van Sant longed to recapture the wayward, carnal atmosphere of the earlier movie but found himself locked in a smaller, more brittle project.—A.L. (Village Theatre VII, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

**Unstrung Heroes**—Diane Keaton's film, about a boy who goes to live with his uncles in a time of crisis (his mother is dying), is based on sportswriter Franz Lidz's 1991 memoir; the script, by Richard LaGravenese, spins sentimental cotton candy around the experience. Keaton's style is fluid and detailed, and she gets lovely performances from her actors, particularly Maury Chaykin, as the neurotic uncle who clutters his nest with old newspapers and junk, and John Turturro, as the boy's sad, down-to-earth dad. In the end, though, the film is undone by its shaky premise that crazy people are more in touch with life than their rational counterparts. It tries too hard to make lunacy endearing.—B.D. (Village East Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 23rd St. West Triplex, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

**The Usual Suspects**—A treat. Five criminals, ranging from petty to pro, are herded into a police lineup on suspicion of armed robbery. They walk, but not before joining forces to plan a new crime—a bright idea that soon darkens with treachery and ends in a bulk order of dead bodies. Director Bryan Singer and screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie somehow keep from getting lost in the spiralling plot, a game in which everyone—the good, the bad, and the audience—gets to play sucker. Singer's style may overheat now and then, but his cast, headed by Chazz Palminteri and Kevin Spacey, keeps things cool.—A.L. (8/14/95) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, New York Twin, and Lincoln Square.)

## ALSO PLAYING

**BABE** (reviewed in our issue of 9/4/95): 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **BELLE DE JOUR:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE BIG GREEN:** Village East Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . **BRAVEHEART** (6/5/95): Manhattan Twin. . . . **THE BROTHERS MCMULLEN:** Angelika Film Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, 23rd St. West Sixplex, and Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **CLUELESS:** Movieland 8th Street Triplex. . . . **CONGO:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . .

**CRUMB** (5/1/95): Film Forum 3. . . . **DEAD BEAT:** Cinema Village. . . . **DESPERADO** (9/11/95): Embassy 3. . . . **FREE WILLY 2: THE ADVENTURE HOME:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **HALLOWEEN: THE CURSE OF MICHAEL MYERS:** Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 86th Street East Twin, and Embassy 4. . . . **THE INNOCENT:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **KIDS** (7/31/95): Quad Cinema. . . . **LIVING IN OBLIVION:** Quad Cinema and Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **MORTAL KOMBAT:** Criterion Center. . . . **MUTE WITNESS:** Angelika 57. . . . **NADJA:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **THE NET** (8/7/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **NINE MONTHS** (7/24/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE POSTMAN:** Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE RUN OF THE COUNTRY:** Baronet. . . . **STEAL BIG, STEAL LITTLE:** 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **TO WONG FOO, THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, JULIE NEWMAR** (9/11/95): First & 62nd Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, and Chelsea Cinemas. . . . **UNZIPPED:** Quad Cinema and Cinema 3. . . . **A WALK IN THE CLOUDS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **WINGS OF COURAGE** (4/24/95): Lincoln Square.

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## THEATRE ADDRESSES

*(For show times, call 777-FILM.)*

### EAST SIDE

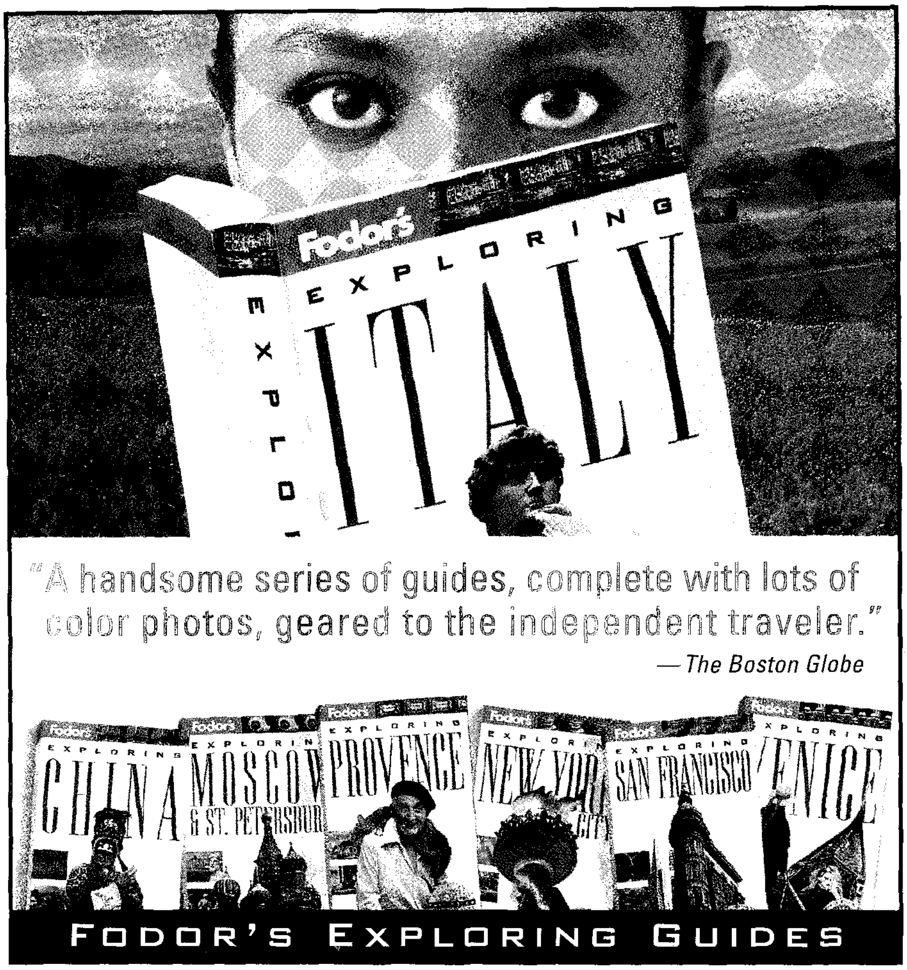
**Angelika Film Center,** 18 W. Houston St.
**Movieland 8th Street Triplex,** 36 E. 8th St.
**Village Theatre VII,** 3rd Ave. at 11th St.
**Cinema Village,** 22 E. 12th St.
**Village East Cinemas,** 2nd Ave. at 12th St.
**19th Street East 6,** B'way at 19th St.
**Murray Hill Cinemas,** 160 E. 34th St.
**34th Street Showplace,** 238 E. 34th St.
**34th St. East,** 241 E. 34th St.
**Eastside Playhouse,** 3rd Ave. at 55th St.
**Sutton 1 and 2,** 3rd Ave. at 57th St.
**Gotham Cinema,** 3rd Ave. at 58th St.
**Plaza,** 42 E. 58th St.
**Manhattan Twin,** 3rd Ave. at 59th St.
**59th Street East Cinema,** 239 E. 59th St.
**Baronet and Coronet,** 3rd Ave. at 59th St.
**Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue,** 3rd Ave. at 60th St.
**First & 62nd Cinemas,** 400 E. 62nd St.
**Gemini 1 and 2,** 2nd Ave. at 64th St.
**Beekman,** 2nd Ave. at 66th St.
**New York Twin,** 2nd Ave. at 67th St.
**68th St. Playhouse,** 3rd Ave. at 68th St.
**Tower East,** 3rd Ave. at 71st St.
**East 85th Street,** 1st Ave. at 85th St.
**Park & 86th Street Cinemas,** 125 E. 86th St.
**Orpheum VII,** 3rd Ave. at 86th St.
**86th Street East Twin,** 3rd Ave. at 86th St.

### WEST SIDE

**Film Forum 1 and 3,** 209 W. Houston St.
**Waverly 1 and 2,** 6th Ave. at 3rd St.
**Art Greenwich Twin,** Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
**Quad Cinema,** 34 W. 13th St.
**Chelsea Cinemas,** 260 W. 23rd St.
**23rd St. West Triplex,** 333 W. 23rd St.
**Guild,** 33 W. 50th St.
**Worldwide Cinemas,** 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves.
**Ziegfeld,** 141 W. 54th St.
**Carnegie Hall Cinemas,** 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
**Angelika 57,** 225 W. 57th St.
**Paris,** 4 W. 58th St.
**Cinema 3,** 2 W. 59th St.
**62nd & Broadway,** 62 W. 62nd St.
**Lincoln Plaza Cinemas,** B'way at 63rd St.
**Regency,** B'way at 67th St.
**Lincoln Square,** B'way at 68th St.
**84th Street Sixplex,** B'way at 84th St.
**Metro Cinema 1 and 2,** B'way at 99th St.
**Olympia I and II,** B'way at 107th St.

### TIMES SQUARE AREA

**Criterion Center,** B'way at 44th St.
**Embassy 1,** B'way at 46th St.
**Embassy 2, 3, and 4,** 7th Ave. at 47th St.
**Astor Plaza,** 44th St. at B'way.
**National Twin,** B'way at 44th St.



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## REVIVALS

*(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)*

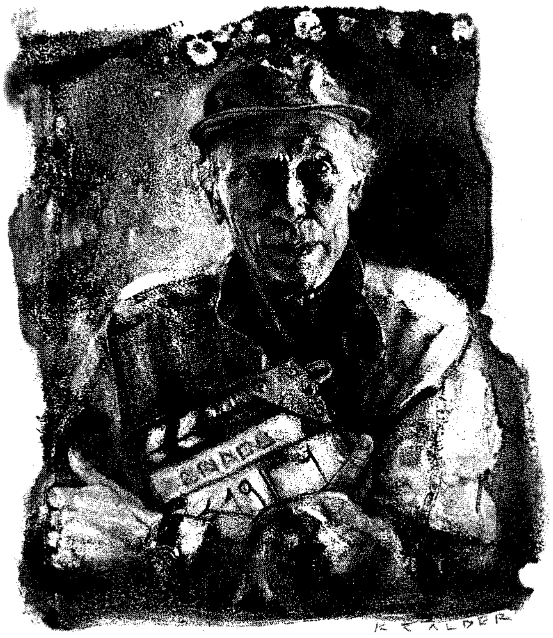
**Bad Lieutenant** (1992)—It's supposed to be about redemption; actually, it's beyond redemption. Harvey Keitel plays a degenerate New York City cop who gambles disastrously on the Mets, ingests drugs and booze almost continuously, grabs stolen money, and sexually harasses a couple of Jersey girls while masturbating in the street. On the plus side, a brutally raped nun forgives her attackers and inspires Keitel to open his heart to Jesus, who climbs off the Cross and appears to him in a vision. Keitel overacts in a vacuum—he writhes in Method Hell. And Abel Ferrara, who co-wrote the script with Zoe Lund, directs in a relentless lowdown style that dissipates even the shock value. Yes, you get to see Harvey Keitel's penis; the only surprise is that Jesus keeps His under wraps.—M.S. (American Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 22.)

**Le Beau Mariage** (1982)—Béatrice Romand plays Eric Rohmer's heroine, Sabine, a bright working girl who, at twenty-five, is weary of freedom and insecurity. When she meets a lawyer who she decides is her type, she goes after him so briskly and transparently that she might seem a madwoman. She's an orderly little campaigner—watching her lay siege to this man is like watching someone arrange his desk. The film is full of glib, precise chatter and the clickety-click of Sabine's high heels. Rohmer, who wrote the script, never gives us a clue to why she doesn't draw upon her knowledge of men to be more elusive. Since we see her humiliating herself, she becomes poignant, and at the end, when she comes to her senses, we want to see her play the game right. But the movie ends just when it begins to be interesting. In French.—P.K. (Florence Gould Hall; Oct. 24.)

**Corrina, Corrina** (1994)—It's the fifties, and Ray Liotta is a widowed, atheistic jingle writer searching for a housekeeper who can also play surrogate mommy to seven-year-old Tina Majorino. He lucks out with Whoopi Goldberg. She boasts a degree in musicology, and she's a natural with kids and with words—she can crack a rhyme scheme for Jell-O Instant Pudding. Goldberg gives a varied, even jazzy performance as Ms. Wonderful. But the movie is hopelessly pedantic—chock-full of lessons about grief, racism, and, so help us, God. The bright spots include Joan Cusack's ticky cameo as Goldberg's tippling, sex-starved predecessor; Curtis Williams, Jr.,'s showoff gaiety as Goldberg's nephew; club singer Jevetta Steele doing "Over the Rainbow"; and choice cuts by Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, and Louis Armstrong on the soundtrack. Jessie Nelson produced, directed, and wrote the semiautobiographical script.—M.S. (Whitney Museum; Oct. 19-20.)

**Ghostbusters** (1984)—A scare comedy, with Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, and Harold Ramis as parapsychologists who try to save New York City from an influx of spooks. Murray is the film's comic mechanism: the more supernatural the situation, the more jaded his reaction. But nobody else has much in the way of material, and since there's almost no give-and-take among the three men, Murray's lines fall on dead air. The film cost roughly thirty-two million dollars, and the producer-director, Ivan Reitman, may have been overwhelmed by the scale of the sets and special effects; his work here is amateurish, with kids'-movie pacing. The movie does have some things going for it. Playing opposite Murray, Sigourney Weaver is a living zinger; when she stands talking to Murray, she's eye to eye with him and she looks vivid and indestructible.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 21-22.)

**The Hunger** (1983)—The director, Tony Scott, develops so many trashy, flashy ways to illustrate his premise that he doesn't leave any room to tell a story. Catherine Deneuve is an Egyptian vampire who mates with David Bowie for three centuries. According to some demonological biocycle, he becomes disgustingly old, and she must find a new partner. Deneuve's prey is Susan Sarandon—an expert on aging! Complete with a gauzy lesbian love scene, the movie is laughably chichi.—M.S. (A Different Light Bookstore; Oct. 22.)



*At Florence Gould Hall, films directed by Eric Rohmer.*

KELYNN Z. ALDER

**Paisan** (1946)—Each of the six parts of Roberto Rossellini's episodic film has a story and deals with an aspect of the war that had just ended. The present-tense semidocumentary visual style is innovative, the content less so. Some of the stories have a tidy O. Henry finish, and there's a lot of sentimentality, though the film gives the impression of being loose and open. The script, by Federico Fellini and Rossellini, was based on stories they and others had written. In English, French, Italian, and German.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 20-22 and 24.)

## LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)*

**Film Forum 2,** 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—Oct. 18: "Hatter's Castle" (1941, Lance Comfort) and "A Window in London" (1939, Herbert Mason). . . . Oct. 19: "London Belongs to Me" (1948, Sidney Gilliat) and "The Dark Man" (1950, Jeffrey Dell). . . . Oct. 20: "Never Let Go" (1960, John Guillermin) and "Obsession" (1948, Edward Dmytryk). . . . Oct. 21-22: "Gaslight" (1939, Thorold Dickinson) and "The Brothers" (1947, David Macdonald). . . . Oct. 23: "They Made Me a Fugitive" (1947, Alberto Cavalcanti) and "Daybreak" (1946, Compton Bennett). . . . Oct. 24: "It Always Rains on Sunday" (1947, Robert Hamer) and "For Them That Trespass" (1948, Cavalcanti).

**Museum of Modern Art,** Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Oct. 19 at 2:30: "The Last Flight" (1931, William Dieterle). . . . ¶ Oct. 19 at 3 and 6: "Kihnu Kristjan" (1922, an Estonian film, with English voice-over), "Estonia Returns" (1995, Mark Soosaar), and "The Elder of Diplomacy" (1995, Soosaar), all documentaries. . . . ¶ Films by the Greek director Pantelis Voulgaris. Most of the films are in Greek, with English subtitles. Oct. 20 at 2:30 and Oct. 22 at 5: "Jimmy the Tiger" (1966) and "Happy Day" (1976). . . . Oct. 20 at 7: "The Thief" (1965) and "The Engagement of Anna" (1972). . . . Oct. 21 at 12:30: "Dance of the Goats" (1971) and "The Great Love Songs" (1973) . . . . Oct. 21 and 24 at 2:30: "Stone Years" (1985). . . . Oct. 21 at 5 and Oct. 23 at 6: "Quiet Days in August" (1991). . . . Oct. 22 at 2: "Eleftherios Venizelos" (1980). . . . Oct. 23 at 2:30 and Oct. 24 at 6: "The Striker with No. 9" (1988). . . . ¶ Oct. 20 at 3, 6, and 8; Oct. 21-22 at 2 and 5; and Oct. 23 at 3: A retrospective of the works of Stan Brakhage.

**Walter Reade Theatre,** Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—Roberto Rossellini's war trilogy. Oct. 19 at 2, Oct. 20 at 2 and 6:30, and Oct. 21-22 at 4: "Open City" (1945). . . . Oct. 20 at 4 and 8:30, Oct. 21-22 at 6, and Oct. 24 at 2, 4:15, and 8:45: "Paisan" (†). . . . Oct. 21-22 at 8:30: "Germany, Year Zero" (1947). . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. Oct. 21-22 at 2: "Ghostbusters" (†).

**Symphony Space,** B'way at 95th St. (864-5400)—Oct. 24 at 7: "Greed" (1924, Erich von Stroheim; silent). . . . Oct. 24 at 9:30: "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" (1972, Werner Herzog; in German).

**American Museum of the Moving Image,** 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—Films directed by Abel Ferrara. Oct. 21 at 2: "Ms. 45" (1980). . . . Oct. 21 at 4: "Driller Killer" (1979). . . . Oct. 22 at 2: "Bad Lieutenant" (†). . . . Oct. 22 at 5: "Snake Eyes" (1993). Mr. Ferrara will be present on Oct. 22.

**Anthology Film Archives,** 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Films by the Russian director Dziga Vertov. Oct. 19 at 7: "Shagai, Soviet" (1926) and "A Sixth of the World" (1926). . . . Oct. 20 at 10: "The Eleventh Year" (1928). . . . Oct. 21 at 8: "Man with the Movie Camera" (1929). . . . Oct. 22 at 7: "Entuziam" (1931) and "Three Songs About Lenin" (1934). . . . ¶ Oct. 19 at 8:30: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). . . . ¶ Oct. 20 at 8: Four short films by Stan Brakhage. . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 6: "A Child's Garden and the Serious Sea" (1991, Brakhage).

**A Different Light Bookstore,** 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Oct. 22 at 7, the feature will be "The Hunger" (†).

**Florence Gould Hall,** 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Oct. 24 at 12:30 and 6: "The Aviator's Wife" (1981, Eric Rohmer; in French). . . . Oct. 24 at 3:15 and 8:45: "Le Beau Mariage" (†).

**Whitney Museum,** Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-0537)—Oct. 18 at 3: "Seven Songs for Malcolm X" (1993, John Akomfrah). . . . Oct. 19 at 2 and 6 and Oct. 20 at 3: "Corrina, Corrina" (†). . . . Oct. 21 at 1 and 4 and Oct. 22 at 1 and 3:30: "Mystery Train" (1989, Jim Jarmusch).

**Miller Theatre,** Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. (854-7799)—Documentaries that have been nominated for or have won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature or Best Documentary Short Subject. Oct. 18 at 7:30: "The Vanishing Prairie" (1954, James Algar), "Neighbors" (1952, Norman McLaren), and "Universe" (1960, Roman Kroitor and Colin Low).

**Angelika 57,** 225 W. 57th St.—The 12th Israel Film Festival, from Oct. 19 to Nov. 2 (except Fridays), will show feature, documentary, and short films. Among those being shown are "Passover Fever," directed by Shemi Zarhin, and "Under the Domin Tree," directed by Eli Cohen. (For information about other titles and schedules, call 644-4151.)

**Cinema Village,** 22 E. 12th St.—Oct. 20-24, the New York University International Student Film Festival, showing sixty works from twenty-two schools representing eighteen countries (including Egypt, Germany, Israel, Japan, Poland, and the United States). (For titles and schedules, call 998-1795.)

**Museum of Television and Radio,** 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Television shows by the team of William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. Through Oct. 29: "Huckleberry Hound" and "Jonny Quest.". . . ¶ James Dean's television appearances. Through Oct. 22: "A Long Time Till Dawn" (1953).

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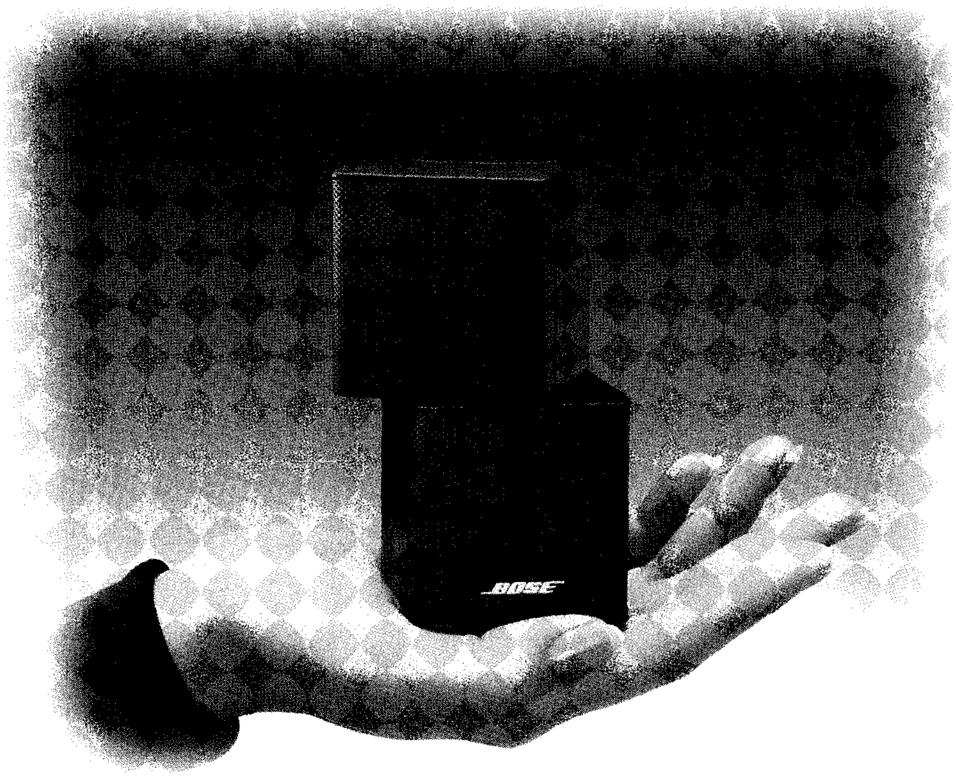

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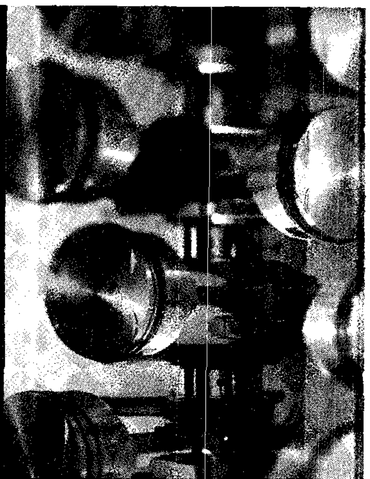

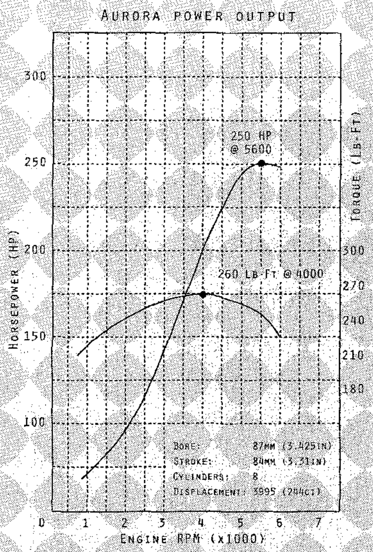

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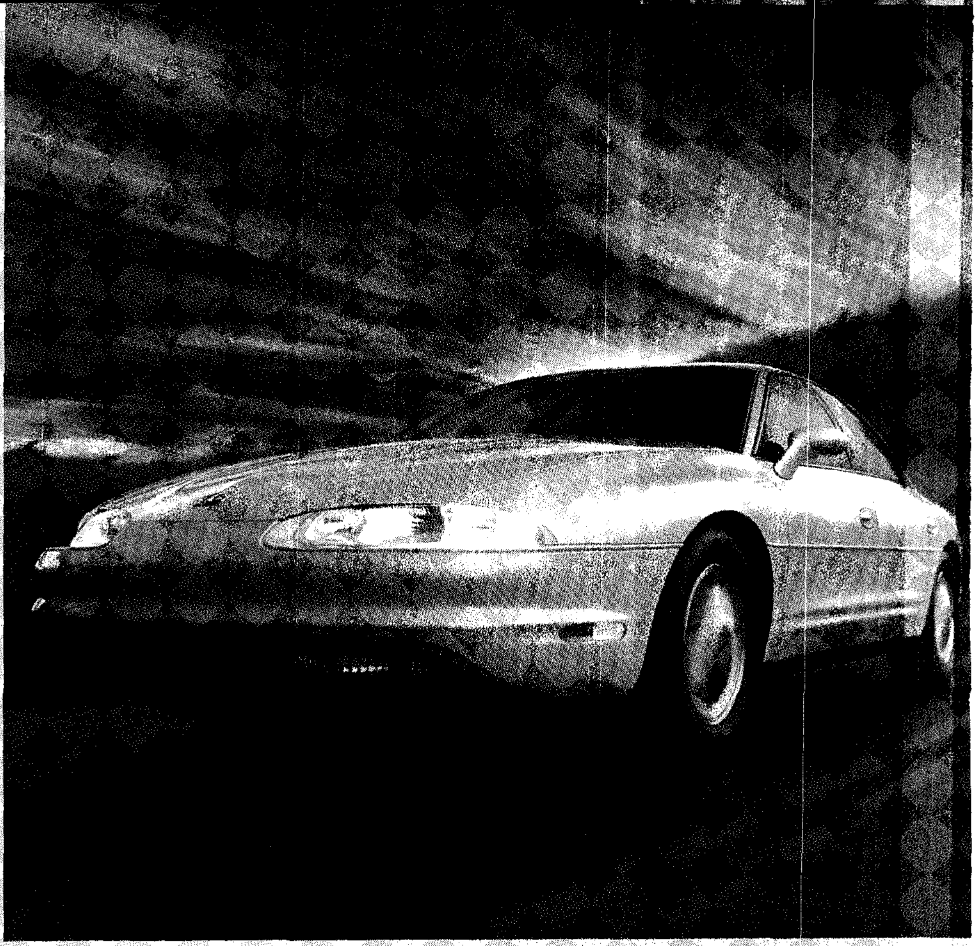

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THE NEW YORKER

# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## CATERING TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Last month, Carl Sacks catered a cliff-hanger lunch at the United Nations over the rickety Bosnia accord, but he says that that occasion wasn't half as tense as the "tasting" that had been convened to settle on the menu for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's October 21st gala dinner in honor of the U.N.'s fiftieth anniversary. With the sound of shrieking power saws and pounding hammers in the background, Sacks, the calm, slow-talking general manager of a Manhattan catering company called Great Performances, turned to Irene Halligan, Mayor Giuliani's commissioner for protocol, and explained that there was construction going on next door and that he'd go and check on it. Then he rolled his eyes ever so slightly and told David Rosengarten, who sat across from him, to hold his thoughts about the New York State goat-cheese croutons.

The dinner being planned will probably be the largest gathering of world leaders for a meal in the history of the world: nearly two hundred were invited; a hundred and fifty are expected. At the last minute, the Mayor's wife, Donna Hanover, had bowed out of the tasting, which was held at Great Performances' headquarters, on Spring and Hudson, and sent Rosengarten, her bubbly co-anchor on the TV Food Network, in her place. "You know, I think the croutons are too tough," Rosengarten said earnestly, after Sacks had returned to the meeting. "We need to imagine a world leader faced with the very real predicament of being nervous about cutting his crouton and breaking a plate."

Perfectly framed between two spectacular silver candlesticks, Jeanne Stafford, the executive director of the Mayor's Host Committee, nodded, as if Rosengarten were explaining the importance of nuclear nonproliferation. Sacks turned to Stafford and said, "Thinner croutons. No problem."

Along with the usual florists, produce venders, and rental agents, Sacks has also had to spend a lot of time dealing with the Secret Service, the F.B.I., the White House, and the State Department. "At last report, Fidel might come," he said. "What I want to know is: Is Saddam coming? He's invited. Christ, I think they're all invited." Actually, seven nations were not invited to the dinner. In a kind of diplomatic "got lost in the mail" excuse, the Mayor's office, which issued the invitations, did not invite any world leader the United States government is not speaking to—that means Fidel, Saddam, Qaddafi, Rafsanjani, North Korea, Somalia, and Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Outside of the military arena, world leaders generally do not crash events to which they are not invited.

Sacks and his colleagues were trying to visualize world peace as a cuisine. No beef (Hindus); no shellfish (Jews and Muslims); no alcohol in the food preparation (Muslims); no pork (forget it); no white hand linen (Sacks's explanation: "I guess it's offensive to some East Asian country. Anyway, we've been told it's out"). "The State Department told us early on that only chicken is going to fly," Sacks said, and then offered his disparaging assessment of the bird: "Hard to remember, hard to ruin." In the kitchen, standing in front of a pile of diced bright-red peppers, Mary Beth Boller, the chef, grimaced and said, "Chicken is so neutral. You *can* stuff it, but then it's just stuffed chicken." And chicken is also easy to upstage: a colorful alternative vegetarian dish (also a requirement) might give the impression that more fuss had been made over the vegetarian world leaders than over the carnivorous ones. A telephone conferral with the etiquette consultant Letitia Baldrige resolved the issue; she suggested that hungry heads of state have been slaughtering lamb for centuries, and the Host Committee agreed. "We're going with lamb," Sacks said. He then went on to explain that one of the things he has learned is that the least politically problematic food on the planet seems to be ice cream: "It's just one of those things that's not controversial." So Ben & Jerry's is donating something called a Multi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JARRETT HUDDLESTON

Layer Ice Cream Bombe. "The Secret Service is not thrilled with the name," Sacks said.

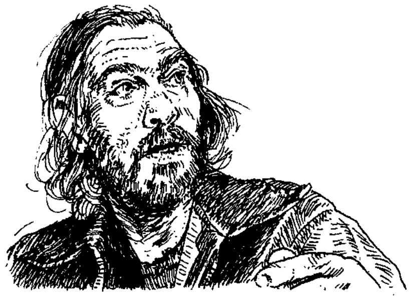
Diplomatic protocol demands that all the world leaders be served at exactly the same time. At last count, two hundred and forty-five servers had been hired for the dinner—one for each world leader, or maybe even one and a half. Earlier, Sacks's biggest headache had involved poison tasters, whose services had been requested by some of the world's least secure leaders. "The Secret Service assures me they will handle all that," he said. As for the seating arrangements, Stafford explained that "the highest priority will be given to leaders who have had a recent death threat made against them." At the most important dinner party in world history, the best seats will go to heads of state who can prove that someone wants to kill them.

# THE LUSH LIFE OF A MUSCOVITE

ON the Russian island of Sakhalin, workers with a persistent thirst begin their day with a nip of ordinary vodka, head into their coffee break with a swig of bathtub gin, drink a lunch of eau de cologne, sup with a tonic of bug spray, and end it all (if possible) with the purest grain alcohol and an optional splash of fruit juice. Which is all to say that "Moscow Stations," the dramatic version of Venedikt Yerofeyev's autobiographical novel now on at the Union Square Theatre, is a work of the purest realism—at least, where the drinking is concerned.

It's a wonder that "Moscow Stations" is not better known. In many ways, it is the successor—the Soviet-era successor—to Gogol's "Dead Souls." The two works are comic historical bookends, with Gogol's novel portraying the sloth and corruption of feudal Russia and Yerofeyev's novel portraying the sloth and corruption of feudal Communism. The truth is that while the streets of Moscow may be clogged with Volvos and Mercedes sedans these days—in keeping with the flash of a new capitalism—the anguish and dissipation of the late, coruscating empire are still the real fact of life for most people. "Moscow Stations" remains a lesson in the current events of the Russian soul.

Venedikt Yerofeyev, who died in 1990 of throat cancer and a lifetime of drinking, never caught the notice of that vast world known to pre-glasnost Russia as "abroad." Unlike Solzhenitsyn or Sinyavsky, or any number of other samizdat writers, he didn't seem to be saying anything of great importance. He revealed no body counts, exposed no officials, and engaged in no ideological debates. Until just a few years before Yerofeyev's death, in fact, "Moscow Stations" was a cult classic, a manuscript that circulated in typescript and rarely moved beyond a few major cities.



*Tom Courtenay in "Moscow Stations"*

THE production at the Union Square Theatre, a brilliant one-man show with the British actor Tom Courtenay, is a remarkable rendition of the novel's mixture of high, drunken comedy—its portrait of a soul filled with wisdom and pickled in Hunter's vodka. Yerofeyev worked at a variety of lousy jobs around Moscow, and invariably lost each one after a few weeks by failing to meet even the unexacting Russian standards of diligence. Yerofeyev was a connoisseur of the home-invented beverage. At one point, he provides the recipes for his favorite cocktails: Tears of a Komsomol Girl, Balsam of Canaan, Aunt Clara's Kiss, and the Spirit of Geneva. (This last was a heady blend of two hundred grams of Zhiguli beer, fifty grams each of white-lilac toilet water and athlete's-foot remedy, and a hundred and fifty grams of alcohol varnish.)

Yerofeyev once remarked that "Moscow Stations" was "ninety pages of funny stuff and ten pages of sad stuff." The book is mostly about a clear-eyed man, no matter how many Tears of a Komsomol Girl (mouthwash, nail polish, lemon soda, lavender toilet water, verbena, and herbal lotion) he has consumed. For one thing, he does not cater to the American taste in Soviet writers: he does not preach. He says, "I, who have consumed so much that I've lost track of how much, and in what order—I'm the soberest man in the world."

Last winter, Courtenay was in New York for a production of "Uncle Vanya," which even he admits was a disaster. But he connects absolutely with the Yerofeyev. It is uncanny how much Courtenay looks his part: drawn, reddened face; long, greasy hair; freestanding trousers. Not long ago, a producer asked Courtenay whether, now that he is in his late fifties, he might want to play the classic role of aging and fatherhood—King Lear. Courtenay, who has done his fill of Shakespeare, said he did not. "Moscow Stations," which he performed for eight weeks last year at London's Garrick Theatre, was the role—go ahead, *say it*—of a lifetime. The fact that so few have heard of the book, or its author, makes it all the sweeter.

"Yerofeyev seems like a soul brother to me; Lear doesn't," Courtenay said the other day. "I think if you are going to play Lear you had best be a tyrant. Laurence Olivier was a great Lear, and he was a kind of tyrant. He did not need to shout or rage. He could be the tyrant quietly—it radiated from him. Yerofeyev is just such a sympathetic character to me. Listening to him is like listening to that Mozart piece, the Divertimento, which seems to take in everything—the sadness, the heartbreak, the beauty, the fun in spite of it all. He gets to the heart of the matter."

## CONNECTICUT-BOUND

HARVEY FIERSTEIN couldn't wait to get home on a recent Sunday evening. The playwright had just finished his duties as the master of ceremonies for the first annual Gay and Lesbian American Music Awards, at the Supper Club, and was out of the building before the lights came up. "I've got to get out of here," he said, as fans started to surround him on West Forty-seventh Street. "My dogs are at home in Connecticut waiting for me with all their legs crossed."

Keeping up with Fierstein as he stormed along Broadway in an olive-green Armani suit was Joe Grabarz, the executive director of the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union. "We've been seeing each other for under a year," Fierstein said, "so our relationship still feels like a honeymoon—except for the fact that we never see each other. If we could both stop all these events, our life would be a lot more romantic."

Grabarz nodded, and said, "Harvey likes to say that the quality he looks for most in a lover is agoraphobia."

"That's right," Fierstein said.

Earlier that day, Fierstein and Grabarz, like many of their neighbors, were sitting on their deck and enjoying the fine autumn weather. "We were both wondering why we were leaving to come down here," said Grabarz, who travels extensively for work. For yet another worthy event, of course, and an opportunity for Fierstein to plug his new comedy album, "This Is Not Going to Be Pretty."

At a parking garage on West Forty-eighth Street, Fierstein picked up an almost shockingly red Jeep Cherokee, which had a bag of cans in the back which would eventually be recycled. "Everybody in our town has four-wheel drive," Fierstein said.

"Except most of them are green, with a child in the back seat named Chris," Grabarz added.

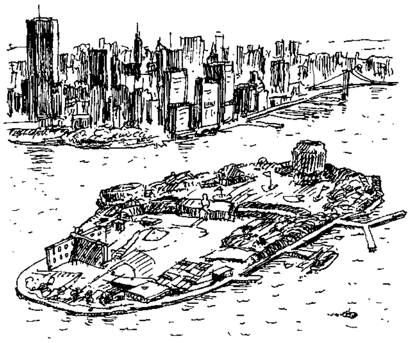
"Terrible shades of the darkest green," Fierstein said. "Who would want that?"

For Halloween, he and Grabarz planned to have no plans. As Fierstein started the engine, he said, "Going out on Halloween is too much like work."

## AND THE REAL ESTATE!

IF you've ever gazed out to port while taking the ferry to Staten Island or the Statue of Liberty, you will have noticed a large forested island with low brick buildings sheltered by the trees. Governors Island, as this lovely and mysterious spot is called, belongs to the United States government and, since 1966, has served as the largest Coast Guard base in the country. You can't visit it without clearance. But the Coast Guard is now preparing to formally announce that, as part of an ongoing "streamlining" process, it will begin decamping from the island; a spokesman said a decision is "imminent." That will be tough on the four thousand sailors and civilians who are quartered there, but for other New Yorkers the base-closing could open some really staggering residential opportunities—a hundred and seventy-three acres of prime harbor-front property with views of Wall Street, landmark houses, a nine-hole golf course, and a Burger King that has its own bowling alley. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee voted earlier this year to sell the island, whose potential value the Congressional Budget Office put at five hundred million dollars. Donald Trump, one of many potential bidders on the island should the federal government auction it off, has described the parcel as "great visually, great artistically, and great for security." A recent visit showed that Trump's hyperbole was, for once, justified.

Situated eight minutes by ferry from the southern tip of Manhattan, Governors Island looks less like a military installation than an Ivy League campus. The island has the gabled, shaded, cobblestoned serenity of a distant time and place. And the real estate! Many of the senior officers live along Nolan Park, a grassy quadrangle dotted with shade trees, where a lighthouse bell, dated 1888, stands as a small shrine in their midst. The Nolan Park houses are mostly clapboard, their second- or third-story verandas supported by slender pillars with fine scrollwork around the capitals—the sort of Georgian touch that can send property values through the roof. But these dwellings pale by comparison with their brick neighbors. The Donald himself might cast an envious eye on the twenty-seven-room Admiral's House, which looks out over Buttermilk Channel toward the South Brooklyn shore and is currently occupied by Vice Admiral James Loy, commander of the Atlantic Area. And down the road is the Governor's House, which dates from 1708 and is thus one of the oldest residences in New York City.


*Governors Island*

And the amenities! Governors Island

has six tennis courts, four baseball diamonds, open fields, and the only golf course convenient to Wall Street. The first hole, a three-hundred-and-twenty-five-yard par-four dogleg right, looks just a little too forgiving, but Lieutenant John Shallman, the chief press officer on the base, says that club members keep the rough long and the greens slick in order to hold on to a U.S.G.A. rating. When the golf association decided to raise some funds for maintenance by selling five corporate and twenty-five individual memberships to the public, they received twenty-five hundred calls within two hours. Besides that Burger King with a bowling alley, the island also has a movie theatre, a beauty salon, a motel, a hospital, a public school, and its very own historic stockade—the forbidding Castle Williams. Considering the castle's commanding views of lower Manhattan, the cells, though on the cozy side, could make for smashing studio apartments.

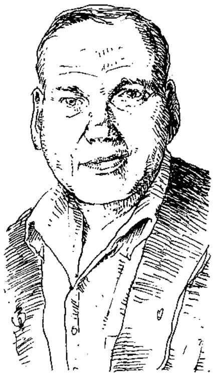
The market is there—especially, as Trump has suggested, to provide a moated and fortified compound for the super-rich. The Coast Guard has kept everyone up in the air by postponing the formal decision to leave from the spring to the summer to the fall, and the delay has made for a trying time on the island. Captain Ronald Silva, the base's commanding officer, just arrived from Portsmouth, Virginia, this summer, and he says that he doesn't know whether he's supposed to run the best darned base in the Coast Guard, insuring port safety and responding to marine disasters and so forth, or close up shop.

The Coast Guard expects to take up to three years to fully debark. After that, it's up to the U.S. Congress. The Transportation Committee is willing to give New York City and State first crack at a purchase at a negogiated price. Since the full Congress has not yet voted, the fate of Governors Island remains undecided. If you want to see a Greek island in the middle of New York Harbor, write to your congressman today.

## THE RELIEF COWBOY

WHATEVER it was that drove Fred Cuny, it wasn't conventional religion—there was precious little about Cuny that was in any way conventional—and he had long let it be known that if anything should ever happen to him on any of his dangerous humanitarian missions, he'd be damned if any of his survivors would try to pull any sort of memorial "service" on his behalf. He hated the idea, and it was one that participants in the Cuny "Celebration," held recently at the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, did their best to avoid.

Indeed, the atmosphere at the gathering was hardly funereal. For one thing, there was no body, nor is there ever likely to be one: Cuny disappeared mysteriously this past April while he was on a mission to Chechnya. It appears that he was murdered by the very Chechens whom he was trying to assist, who had been goaded into a homicidal frenzy by a cleverly framed campaign of disinformation attributed to the Russians, whose ire Cuny had provoked through public pronouncements that he had taken to making (notably in a piece that appeared in *The New York Review of Books*) following an earlier trip at the beginning of the year. After that first trip, Cuny told friends that Chechnya was "the scariest place I've ever been"—which, for a veteran of missions to Biafra, Cambodia, and Somalia, to Guatemala and Mexico City and Armenia after their earthquakes, and to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Sarajevo, to name just a few, was really saying something. Nevertheless, he'd headed back without a moment's hesitation. After all he'd been through, he may have begun to feel that he was (as others certainly imagined him to be) immortal. He was, in fact, only fifty.



*Fred Cuny*

THE assembled guests seemed to be vying with one another to frame perfect epithets that captured the essence of the man. Aryeh Neier, the president of the Soros Foundations (at whose behest Cuny had gone to Chechnya), recalled how, in trying to compose a press release immediately after the disappearance, he'd hit upon the phrase "a mountain of a man"—and everyone nodded concurrence. Someone else compared Cuny to an overbrimming river. He was variously hailed as "the Red Adair of humanitarian relief," "the Lone Ranger of emergency assistance," "the Relief Cowboy," "a cross between MacGyver and the Fridge" (Cuny, a Texan, was a *big* football fan), "halfway between a general and a saint," "the Cal Ripken of relief aid," and "a universal Schindler."

Many of the leading figures from the world humanitarian movement regaled the crowd with incredible tales of Cuny's courage, unflappability, and ingenuity. At one point, for instance, the journalist William Shawcross recalled an interview that Cuny had recently given a British TV crew that was putting together a documentary on Biafra, one of Cuny's first crises. They'd asked him what it had been like working as a pilot ferrying relief shipments to outlying districts, and he recalled taxiing his ramshackle aircraft onto an outback roadway, preparing to take off after one such delivery, when a voice came over his earphones: "Hold it, Red Cross Three, we've got another plane coming in." Watching that plane as it approached, Cuny noticed that it had been hit and its engines were expelling smoke. The plane lurched, banked, and slammed onto the tarmac, erupting into flames—a sheet of fire racing right past Cuny's idling plane. "All right," the squawking voice in his earphones now said. "Red Cross Three cleared for takeoff." Shawcross continued, "And, as Fred put it, 'Nothing stopped, we just kept on going.' Well, in that great relief operation in the sky, Fred will, I know, keep on going."

Toward the end of the convocation, Cuny's youngest brother, Chris, got up and joshed about how he'd heard that Red Adair recently attended a benefit where he found himself being introduced as "the Fred Cuny of oil-field fires." At which point Adair supposedly leaned over, nudged his neighbor, and asked, "Fred *who*?"

Finally, Cuny's astonishingly diminutive mother, Charlotte, approached the podium. "You see before you a very humble person," she said. "When I think of all the wonderful help that the people in this room have given to the world in one way or another, I feel about *this high*." (The mild joke here, of course, was that she *is* about that high.) "And I've done nothing," she went on, "except to give you Fred." ♦

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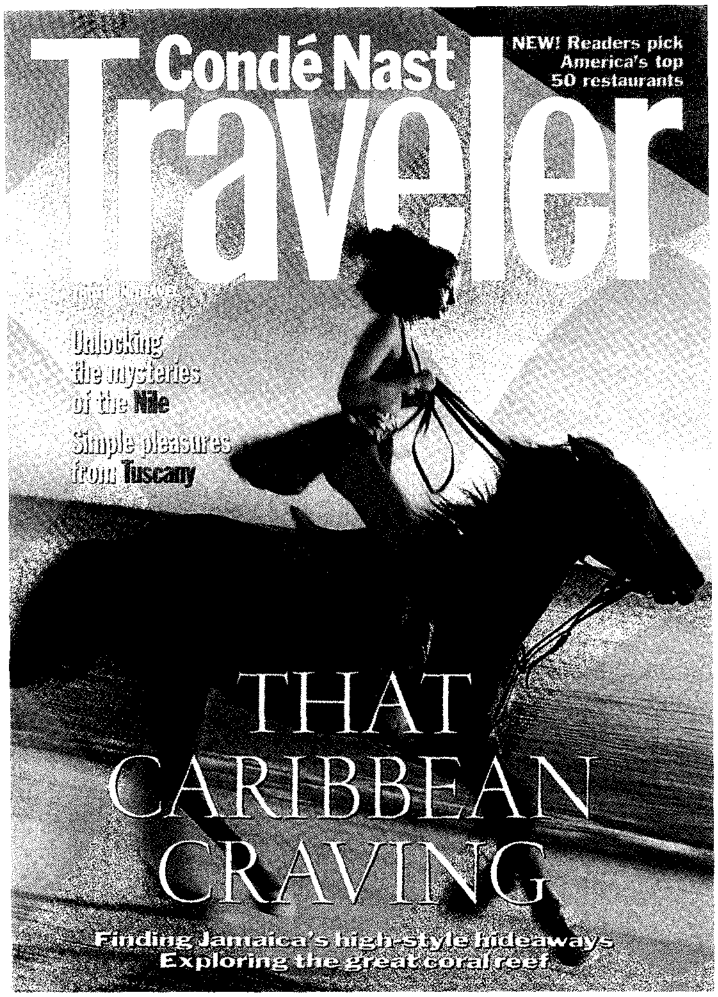
*"Catering to the United Nations," John Hockenberry; "The Lush Life of a Muscovite," David Remnick; "Connecticut-Bound," Bob Morris; "And the Real Estate!," James Traub; "The Relief Cowboy," Lawrence Weschler.*

# PURE PLEASURE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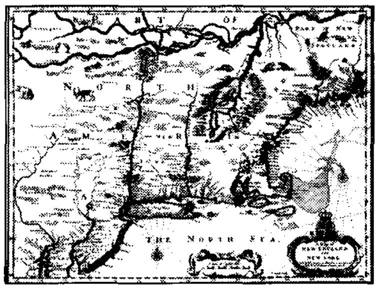

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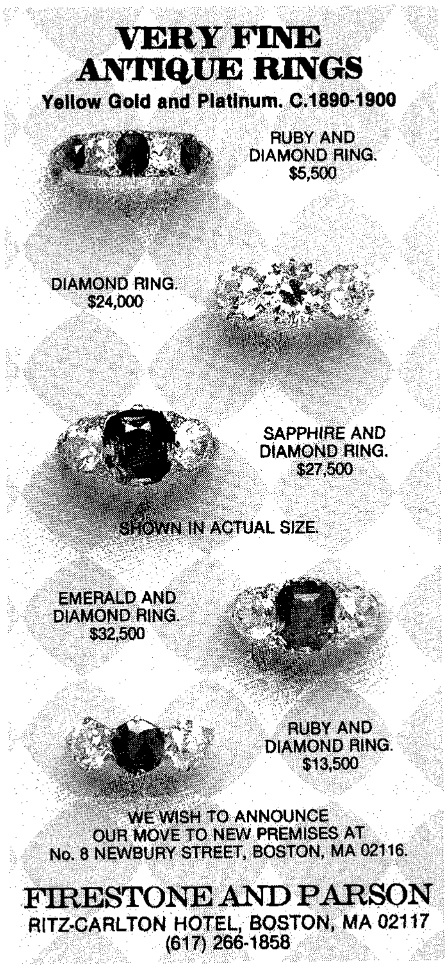

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ANNALS OF LAW

# A HORRIBLE HUMAN EVENT

*The author looks back on being dealt the race card, the lawyers' courtroom tricks—and how the media played the game.*

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

WHEN I left Judge Lance A. Ito's courtroom at noon on Friday, September 29th, and stood before the steam tables in the cafeteria of the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Building, I had only one thought: Praise be—the last lunch. Marcia Clark, the lead prosecutor in the double-murder trial of O. J. Simpson, had begun her rebuttal summation in the morning, and she clearly intended to conclude it later that day. As Clark addressed the jury, racing to rebut each of the defense team's arcane claims about the scientific evidence in the case, she looked the way everyone in that courtroom felt—exhausted, haggard, fed up, and desperate for a glimpse of the outside world. Once she had paused at the lunch break, I ordered my umpteenth chicken burrito and staggered to a table with Sally Ann Stewart, a reporter for *USA Today*, and we chatted about the impending finish of this all-consuming ordeal and the resumption of our normal lives.

The cafeteria covers almost the entire western third of the ground floor of the glass-walled C.C.B. The food is ladled out in the middle, and you can take your tray to either of two seating areas—one facing Temple Street and the other looking out on a parking lot and the Los Angeles *Times* building beyond. Sally and I had turned left, toward the parking lot, where the room was uncharacteristically deserted for that time of day. A few moments later, though, three of Simpson's eleven defense lawyers arrived: Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr.; Carl Douglas; and Barry Scheck. (Lawrence Schiller, the collaborator on the defendant's best-selling book, "I Want to Tell You," was with them.) They set their trays down at a centrally located table, and six bodyguards from the Fruit of Islam, dressed in their trademark bow ties, formed a circle with their backs to Cochran's table and their eyes trained warily outward.

The guards had first appeared in the courthouse at the beginning of the week, and had added a new level of unease and mistrust to an environment that was already extraordinarily charged. By that point, of course, racial tensions had been festering in the Simpson trial for months, yet Cochran had managed to engineer a couple of final ratchets upward for the dénouement. The weekend before summations, he travelled to Washington and spoke to an adoring crowd at the annual legislative conference of the Congressional Black Caucus. In his speech there, he listed the trial in Los Angeles as the latest landmark in the long civil-rights struggle of African-Americans—a procession that, as he summarized it, included Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, the Rodney King trial, and, "yes, even the Simpson case." Now, as the case was about to go to the jury, he had imported into the courthouse the very symbols of strident black nationalism. At that Friday lunch, however, the presence of the grim-faced sentries seemed merely ludicrous, for they had only two reporters and Rose, the cashier, to monitor for false moves.

A few minutes later, Robert Shapiro arrived. There had been a moment—around the time Simpson was arrested—when Shapiro was probably the most famous lawyer in America. He dominated the case by spinning reporters and promoting himself. In January of 1993, almost a year and a half before the murders on Bundy Drive, Shapiro had written a casually revealing article in *The Champion*, a trade publication for criminal-defense lawyers. Entitled "Using the Media to Your Advantage," it offered a step-by-step guide for attorneys handling high-profile cases. The article combined sensible advice—be truthful, be courteous, be prompt—with unctuous preening. Shapiro said, for example, that lawyers should avoid using clichés in talks with the press. "Referring to a case as a tragedy or to a client as being framed does not convey a thoughtful message,” he wrote. “To describe an unfortunate death situation, I use the term ‘a horrible human event.’ ”

By this final Friday, however, Shapiro’s voluble, visible role had been usurped. He had brought both Cochran and F. Lee Bailey into the case, and then had had to watch as Cochran inexorably claimed the lead courtroom role for himself. In January, just before the opening statements in the trial, Shapiro had a very public falling out with Bailey, who was the godfather of one of his sons and had been a close friend. Shapiro claimed that Bailey was leaking disparaging information about him to reporters, and though both remained on the defense team, Shapiro was on his way to becoming the odd man out. As the trial proceeded, the other defense lawyers usually came and went together, but Shapiro arrived and left by himself. He often appeared in the cafeteria alone as well, and on Friday he paid Rose, took a long look at his colleagues and their sentinels, and after this ostentatious pause took a seat by himself at a small table nearby.

*Johnnie Cochran said that the Fuhrman tapes were “like Lay’s potato chips—you can’t put them down, and you can’t eat just one.”*

N. ASCENCIOS

In a big trial, month after month in close proximity fosters a certain intimacy between reporters and lawyers: the two groups can’t share meals, elevators, bathrooms, and gossip and maintain a formal distance. So Sally and I, feeling a little sorry for Shapiro—and always eager to chat with an insider—asked him to sit with us. He picked up his tray, sidled over, and joined in our reveries of life after O.J. His own fantasy, he said, would be to take a month off and join Oscar De La Hoya’s training camp at Big Bear Lake. A serious and skilled amateur boxer at the age of fifty-three, Shapiro couldn’t wait to tear into the heavy bag. He also told us that he had been appalled when Cochran brought the Fruit of Islam into his entourage and that he had been disappointed by Cochran’s summation the previous day. “It was nothing but race, race, race,” he said. “And why am I not reading that in the paper? All I hear is how great his summation was. Why do I keep reading this?” The fact was that many reporters had excoriated Cochran’s naked appeal for an acquittal based on racial solidarity, but Shapiro’s bitterness was such that he apparently had registered only the favorable words about his colleague.

And, of course, “race, race, race” had been central to the defense strategy almost since the day of Simpson’s arrest. As it happened, one of the first race cards had been dealt to me. In an article in the July 25, 1994, issue of this magazine entitled “An Incendiary Defense,” I noted that at Simpson’s preliminary hearing on murder charges Shapiro “could not explain away the most damaging evidence against his client—matching bloody gloves,” especially the glove found by Detective Mark Fuhrman on a pathway at the rear of Simpson’s property. But, as I discovered in conversations with defense lawyers, they had seized upon Fuhrman as “a rogue cop who, rather than solving the crime, framed an innocent man,” and they said they intended to depict Fuhrman as a racist. Given the history of poisonous relations between the Los Angeles Police Department and the city’s black community—a history symbolized by the beating of Rodney King only three years earlier—this was bound to be an inflammatory accusation. The foundation for the defense assault on Fuhrman was a disability claim that Fuhrman had filed against the city in the early nineteen-eighties, in which he said that the stress of patrolling the inner city had left him psychologically scarred. “I have this urge to kill people that upset me,” Fuhrman had told a psychiatrist who examined him. Fuhrman had lost the case and consequently remained with the L.A.P.D., but the file on his claim lay buried in public court files, and that explosive detonated around the time Simpson's lawyers began talking to me.

Thus did Mark Fuhrman become the indispensable bogeyman in the defense team's strategy. At the time of my article not even Simpson's lawyers knew how lucky they were in having come up with the vainglorious, hate-filled Fuhrman. A superior had noted in an evaluation of him that Fuhrman was obsessively intent upon making "the big arrest," and, as we now know, Fuhrman's ego eventually drove him to spin his unforgettable tales of bigoted braggadocio for the tape recorder of the aspiring screenwriter Laura Hart McKinny. It is astonishing in itself that Fuhrman would boast to McKinny about beating suspects, hating "niggers," concocting evidence, and the like. That he would do so on tape suggests a special, twisted vanity. (It is odd, too, that Fuhrman, knowing that the McKinny tapes existed, would sue me and this magazine for libel after the publication of my original story. His lead lawyer in that case dropped him when the tapes became public, and Fuhrman withdrew the suit altogether during the week of the verdict.)

However, it required a certain kind of lawyer to exploit the Fuhrman issue to full effect. Raising a provocative theory with a reporter is one thing; focussing an entire courtroom defense strategy in a nationally televised trial on the racism of an L.A. police officer is another. For that task, the defense brought on Cochran, whose record of success in Los Angeles is probably unparalleled. He has made a handsome living over several decades by representing well-heeled black men accused of crimes and by suing the City of Los Angeles on behalf of black people mistreated by the L.A.P.D. However, to judge by many of Cochran's press clippings, he is a quasi-ecclesiastical figure, doing God's bidding as much as his clients'. When the Los Angeles *Times* ran an article on Cochran in its Sunday magazine on January 29, 1995, the cover headline read, "WHY DID JOHNNIE COCHRAN PRAY BEFORE HE TOOK ON THE O. J. SIMPSON CASE?" In any event, Cochran had no qualms about going for the jugular. Indeed, he took an almost unseemly delight in the Fuhrman issue. Though he claimed to have been appalled at the contents of the McKinny tapes, at one point he told Judge Ito that the tapes were "like Lay's potato chips—you can't put them down, and you can't eat just one."

The Simpson team began exploiting racial tensions in Los Angeles while Shapiro was running Simpson's defense, but Shapiro apparently grew increasingly uncomfortable with the tactic over time—a reflection, perhaps, as much of his displeasure at Cochran's mastery in the courtroom as of his growing unease with the team's strategy. At the defense table in Judge Ito's courtroom, Shapiro looked for months like a man caught in a Thanksgiving from Hell—trapped with fellow-guests he can neither abide nor escape. By the end, Shapiro's alienation was so profound that his joy at his client's stunning acquittal appeared to range from modest to downright imperceptible. When Judge Ito closed the proceedings moments after the verdict was announced, and the television camera went off, Cochran, Douglas, and all the other defense lawyers except Shapiro joined Simpson's family in a fist-pumping, back-slapping explosion of delight. Shapiro did not even smile; instead, he walked over to the prosecution table and offered his hand in consolation. That night, which was Yom Kippur, Shapiro skipped the defense team's victory party, at the Georgia restaurant, on Melrose Avenue, and later that week, in interviews with Barbara Walters and Larry King, he conveyed his disgust at Cochran's use of the race card.

In spinning his reaction to Cochran, Shapiro may simply have been positioning himself for life after the case. He has joined a large law firm—he was in private practice for himself before the Simpson case—and he has an interest in not offending prospective white clients. Still, by nature, and even by legal training, Shapiro is a conciliator, and he turned out to be ill suited for the racial brawl that the case became. He has an unusual quality for a successful lawyer—a strong aversion to conflict. He is a diplomat, a dealmaker. Plea bargains please him; both sides win. Early in his career, after a brief stint as a prosecutor, Shapiro learned the criminal-defense business as the protégé of Harry Weiss, a legendary figure in Los Angeles legal circles. Still elegant and vigorous at age seventy-nine, Weiss, a onetime child star of the vaudeville stage, who wears a trademark monocle, remains a familiar sight in courtrooms around the city. He has long had many clients in Los Angeles's gay community, and in the days when Shapiro worked with him—in the nineteen-seventies and eighties—the police were still routinely arresting men for having sex with one another. "Bob handled many of these cases—vag lewds, we called them," Weiss told me recently. "The cops always had these guys dead bang, and no one ever wanted to go to trial. In those days, the men couldn't stand the embarrassment of fighting it in public, and, anyway, judges never came down too hard on them. So you had to make deals, and Bob made deals. That's the way you've got to do it. He learned."

Nevertheless, Shapiro is a superb trial lawyer, and his examinations were some of the most pointed and effective of the Simpson trial. His cross-examination of Detective Philip Vannatter was a textbook example of zealous, ethical advocacy. Shapiro pointed out that Vannatter had made inaccurate statements to a magistrate in support of a search warrant for Simpson's home the day after the murders; worse, Vannatter had implied that Simpson had fled to Chicago suddenly, though the trip had long been planned. Shapiro also dwelled on Vannatter's peculiar decision to transport Simpson's blood sample all the way from police headquarters to the defendant's house, in Brentwood, when it could easily have been delivered to a nearby site downtown. In a case where the defense was claiming that blood was planted, Shapiro made the detective look foolish at best and sinister at worst.

As always, though, Shapiro couldn't resist hedging his bets. As he conducted his cross-examination of Vannatter, he wore a blue ribbon, symbolizing support for the L.A.P.D., even though the blue ribbon had been revived as an emblem of defiance against the Simpson defense team's attacks. Nor did Shapiro exactly eschew the race card. His clumsy, if genial, use of it turned out to be one of the most unintentionally hilarious episodes of the trial. It came on August 10th, when, as part of the defense case, Shapiro called Dr. Michael Baden, the former chief medical examiner of New York City, to testify about how the results of the autopsies of Ronald Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson might suggest that someone other than O. J. Simpson had killed them.

Curly-haired and loquacious, Baden practically raced to the familiar blue chair when Shapiro summoned him. As with any expert witness, Shapiro began by eliciting Baden's qualifications, which are considerable. The jury learned that Baden had graduated from the City College of New York in 1955 and from the New York University School of Medicine in 1959. Shapiro asked Baden what awards he had received at City College. "I was senior-class president," Baden reported. "Phi Beta Kappa, editor-in-chief of the newspaper, and I was essentially the valedictorian. I spoke at the commencement for the students."

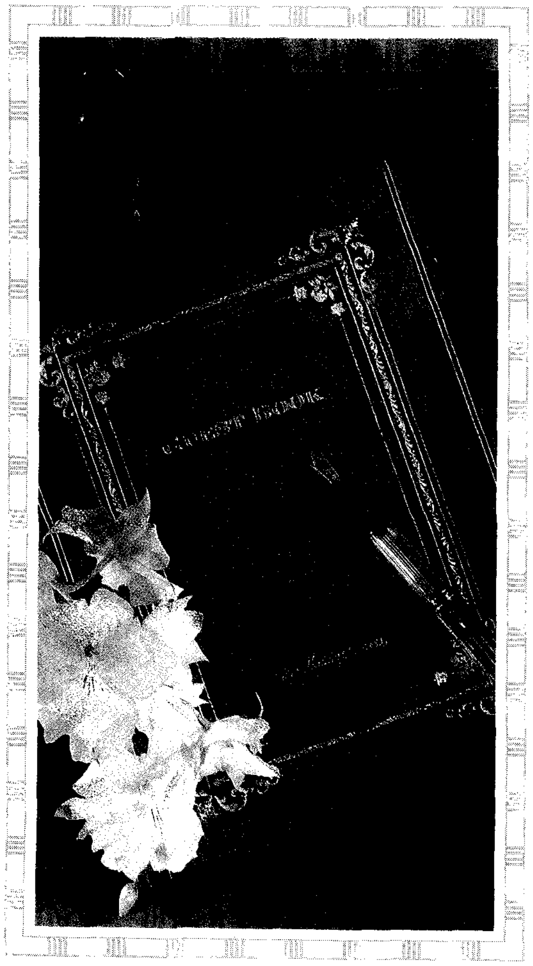
"And where," Shapiro continued seamlessly, "was that college located?"

Baden was suddenly struck dumb, clearly puzzled by how the location of City College might edify these jurors on any issue relevant to the guilt or innocence of Shapiro's client. Baden stumbled as he began his answer. "It is located in upper Manhattan, New York City," he said. Then he caught on, and hastily completed his response with "Harlem area of New York City."

Having informed the nine African-American jurors that this white defense expert came of age in the unofficial capital of black America, Shapiro was off and running.

In example after shameless example, Shapiro sought to turn Baden into a sort of Abraham Lincoln of the autopsy table. Did he serve on any state commissions? "Yes," he replied. "The New York State commission that investigates all deaths that occur in prisons and police custody in New York State"—an entity that Baden said had been set up "after the Attica deaths." Had he served on any federal commissions? Yes, he said, on the congressional committee "formed to investigate the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King." Shapiro then elicited from Baden a lengthy exegesis on "the purpose of the examination of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King." Asked for any "highlights" of his efforts on behalf of prosecutors over the years, Baden replied, "I was recently a witness for . . . a prosecutor of Jackson, Mississippi, in the reinvestigation of the death of Medgar Evers, who had been a civil-rights leader who had been killed in 1963." Had he ever investigated cases for the Los Angeles District Attorney's office? Indeed he had. "I was involved in the investigation—re-autopsy—of a death of a young athlete, a football player in Los Angeles County, Ron Settles, who died in a police precinct in Signal Hill. . . . Initially I was called by the attorney for the family, Mr. Cochran, Johnnie Cochran."

At the cafeteria on that final Friday of the trial, Henry Weinstein, the legal-affairs writer for the Los Angeles *Times*, approached Cochran's table and requested a word with him. Weinstein felt that he had been shoved by one of Cochran's guards a few moments earlier, and he wanted to register a protest. Cochran replied in typical fashion. He rose from the table and listened hard to what Weinstein had to say, and then put both of his hands on Weinstein's shoulders,



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looked the reporter in the eye, and apologized for the incident, which he said would not happen again. There was no further confrontation, and the matter ended there.

All of us covering the case had had similar encounters with Cochran. By the end of the trial, either Dan Abrams, a correspondent for Court TV, or I was commenting on the case almost every day on NBC's "Today" show. Cochran apparently watched the program regularly, for he seemed to catch many of our appearances. During the trial, about two dozen reporters gathered every morning outside Judge Ito's courtroom, on the ninth floor. Shortly before nine, the lawyers would drift in, and you could sometimes catch a word with one of them. But when Cochran had seen Abrams or me on "Today" he would make a beeline for us. Ignoring our colleagues, he would put both hands on our shoulders and offer a critique.

Cochran understood the inherent limitations of our bite-size analyses, and, though he might needle us a little or claim that we had missed the day's important development, he was never harsh. One day near the end of the trial, I said on "Today" that prosecutors were preparing to prove that the gloves found at the murder scene and at Simpson's home were the same pair that Nicole Brown Simpson had bought as a gift for her husband in 1990. As it turned out, the prosecution established only that they were probably the same pair. Cochran remembered my commentary a day later and stopped me in the men's room on the ninth floor. "You see, Jeffrey, that's what you get for listening to them," he told me benevolently as he washed his hands. "They say they're going to prove things, and they don't. Not your fault, but you gotta be careful, Jeffrey." Being singled out that way was flattering—and effective. As Abrams and I made our predawn trips to NBC in Burbank, it was hard not to think, What will Johnnie say?

Even though both Shapiro and Cochran cultivated the press, they received strikingly dissimilar treatment. Shapiro was widely mocked for his perceived hunger for media attention and for his appearances at L.A. society events: Shapiro "goes to the opening of every (bleep)-ing door," said an "eye-rolling publicist" quoted by the Los Angeles *Times* on December 25, 1994. Yet Cochran made Shapiro look like a wallflower. Shapiro did not give a single television interview until after the trial; Cochran gave dozens. Cochran travelled to Washington to attend the Congressional Black Caucus event the weekend before his summation and to Florida to receive an honorary doctorate the weekend before that; Shapiro never spent a full weekend away. (The L.A. *Times* made only one reference to the fact that Cochran's first wife, during their divorce proceedings, had charged him with beating her.) In all, the press gave Cochran almost every break, perhaps fearing the consequences of taking on a prominent African-American.

In the courtroom, Cochran's strategy was simple: impugn the credibility of the evidence by hammering away at the incompetence and racism of the L.A.P.D., personified by the horrifying figure of Mark Fuhrman. Prosecutors tried responding in several ways, none especially successful. At first, before the McKinny tapes rendered Fuhrman indefensible, Marcia Clark tried to defend the L.A.P.D. before the jury, nine of whose members were African-American. Then, once Fuhrman had been damaged beyond repair, she retreated to a yes-but position: yes, he is a racist, but the evidence establishes that he couldn't have planted evidence and that Simpson must be the killer. At the heart of Clark's strategy was a relentless but small-bore response to every single defense claim about the evidence. At times, she was brilliant. Her examination of Allan Park, the limousine driver who took Simpson from his home to the airport shortly after the murders, was a masterpiece. Shifting smoothly between Park's cellular-phone records and his precise recollections, Clark established convincingly that neither Simpson nor his Bronco was at his home at the time of the murders. It is difficult to imagine how else Clark might have tried her case, and in an ordinary trial this method might have worked. Her strategy bespoke an almost ingenuous confidence in the jurors: if only she could show them all the little things that added up to the government's case, those facts would trump the big thing—race—that formed the heart of the defense.

Clark's partner, Christopher Darden, seemed to know better. His position throughout the trial was an excruciating one, and it exacted a considerable emotional toll—most noticeable when he broke down at the prosecutors' post-verdict news conference. Clearly, though, those tears were a long time in coming. I frequently found myself in the elevator with him, and I was struck by the dramatic fluctuations in his demeanor—friendly one day, taciturn the next. As the black prosecutor having to deny time and again that he was an Uncle Tom, he spent the entire trial on the defensive. It was

*"Fresh-raked leaves?"*

scandalous, of course, that any black man should have been forced into such an undignified posture under such circumstances, but that Darden, of all people, should have had to endure it is a rich and disturbing irony.

Darden spent six of his fifteen years as a deputy district attorney prosecuting corrupt police officers. During that assignment, his biggest case involved a police raid, on August 1, 1988, of apartment units at Thirty-ninth Street and Dalton Avenue, a predominantly black part of the city. "This was supposedly a small-time drug den, and they sent about eighty officers to the scene," said Ira Reiner, who was the District Attorney at the time. "And they basically wrecked the place, used a battering ram, pulled out the plumbing, even tore off the outside stairways." Darden headed the investigation. "The first thing that we did was go after the rank-and-file cops," Reiner explained. "But Chris felt very strongly that we needed to hold the command level responsible, and at that point Daryl Gates got involved." Gates, of course, was the longtime police chief in Los Angeles, who had notoriously poor relations with the city's black community. Reiner went on to say, "Gates wrote me this letter claiming that Chris was pushing too hard against the cops, being too aggressive, in his investigation. Anyone else would have laughed it off, but not Chris. He wanted to fire back a letter. This was a classic case of police misconduct, and of course we went ahead with it, and Chris handled it with commitment and emotion. That's just the way he operates." (Of the four officers charged in the case, one defendant pleaded guilty; the others were acquitted after trial.)

In the Simpson case, Darden had recognized Cochran's tactic from the outset. In a pretrial legal argument in January over whether the defense could elicit the information that Fuhrman had used the word "nigger," Darden warned Judge Ito of the consequences of allowing such inflammatory material to be introduced. The evidence would be cast aside, he warned, and the question for the jury would become a very different one from whether O. J. Simpson murdered his ex-wife and her friend. "The test will be whose side are you on," Darden told the judge. "The side of the white prosecutors and the white policemen or the side of the black defendant and his very prominent black lawyer? That is what it is going to do. Either you are with the Man or you are with the Brothers." And, nine months later, that is exactly what happened.

Like Clark, however, Darden was hard pressed to do anything about Cochran's strategy. An astonishing exchange that took place on July 12th, as the heart of Simpson's defense case was being presented, shows just how far Cochran was willing to go to keep the case focussed on race. Cochran had called a man named Robert Heidstra, who lived near Nicole Brown Simpson, to testify about what he saw and heard on the night of the murders. Meek and middle-aged, the French-born Heidstra had testified on direct examination that while he was walking his dogs at around ten-forty on June 12th of last year he heard a commotion near Nicole Brown Simpson's condo—two voices, one clear, saying, "Hey, hey, hey!" and the other indistinct. Heidstra initially appeared to be a good defense witness, since placing the murders at around ten-forty made it seem difficult for the defendant to return to his home and catch his limousine ride by five minutes to eleven.

But Heidstra fell apart during Darden's cross-examination. Heidstra admitted that he usually walked his dogs at ten o'clock, which, if he had done so on the night of the murders, would have put the killings at precisely the time the prosecution claimed. Heidstra said, further, that he saw a white car that could have been a Bronco leaving the scene—another fact that was consistent with the government's case. Finally, Darden pursued him with the statement "The second voice that you heard sounded like the voice of a black man, is that correct?"

Cochran nearly vaulted out of his chair. "Objected to, Your Honor," he sputtered. "I object." The defense caused such a commotion that Judge Ito excused the jury and told Heidstra to step outside for a moment. Darden patiently recounted to the judge that an acquaintance of Heidstra's, Patricia Baret, had told Detective Tom Lange that Heidstra told her that "he heard the very angry screaming of an older man who sounded black." Thus, Darden explained to Ito, he had every right to ask the question.

But Cochran was not to be mollified. "I resent that statement," he thundered. "You can't tell by somebody's voice whether they sounded black. I don't know who made that statement, Baret or

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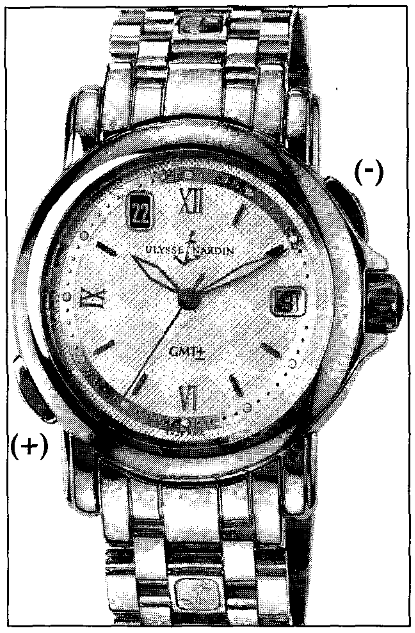

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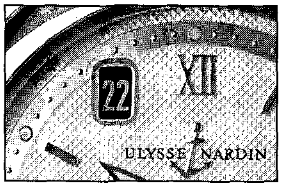

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Lange, and I resent that [as] a racist statement." His tirade continued, "This statement about whether he sounds black or white is racist and I resent it, and that is why I stood and objected. And I think it is totally improper that in America, at this time in 1995, we have to hear this and endure this."

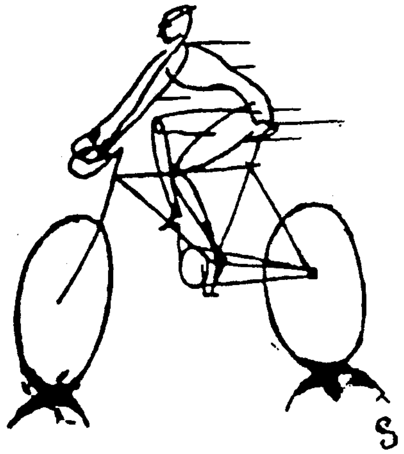
Darden looked stricken. In their many confrontations during the trial, the physical contrast between Cochran and Darden was notable. Cochran is all chest, invariably clad in a sleek double-breasted suit, and he exudes a booming, strutting vitality. Darden still has the body of the college runner he used to be—reedy and lean. He wore double-breasted suits, too, but his jacket was often left unbuttoned, and his chest seemed to disappear behind the fabric. Darden never shouted back, never tried to match Cochran in volume. Instead, on this day, as on other occasions, he merely did his characteristic stooped, duck-toed little pace behind the podium as Cochran thundered on. When Cochran finished, Darden replied evenly that he was simply questioning Heidstra about a statement the witness himself had allegedly made earlier. Then he came as close as he ever did to lashing back, and addressed Cochran with quiet dignity: "That is what created a lot of problems for myself and my family, statements that you make about me and race, Mr. Cochran."

Ito called a recess, tempers cooled, and the entire bizarre exchange provoked little comment in the media. Cochran's statement was outrageous. Whether one sometimes can tell if a speaker is African-American on the basis of his or her speech is inarguable. (In this magazine four weeks ago, for example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., quoted Julian Bond describing Colin Powell as "verbally not black" and Powell himself saying, "I speak reasonably well, like a white person.") Cochran's outburst was a transparent courtroom trick. How better to stop an effective cross-examination than by throwing a stink bomb of racial grievance into the middle of the courtroom?

Cochran never seemed to miss an opportunity to play racial politics in Ito's court. In cross-examining Detective Lange, Cochran pointed out no fewer than three times that the detective lived in Simi Valley—the site of the acquittals of the police officers who beat Rodney King. On September 11th, in the midst of the Fuhrman controversy, Cochran arranged for the entire defense team to wear African kente-cloth ties in front of the jury. These antics brought hoots from the reporters watching the trial on the closed-circuit feed into the media compound, on the twelfth floor of the courthouse, but when it came to actual reporting on the trial we all turned into a remarkably timorous crew. The reporters were an overwhelmingly white group, and, as far as I could tell, no one ever worried that their treatment of the defense was unduly favorable.

FEAR of being called racist transcended everything in that newsroom. This extended, I think, even to discussions of the evidence. The safe course for those of us covering the case was to nitpick along with the defense attorneys. Sure, Simpson cut his left hand on the night of the murders, and DNA tests showed conclusively that it was Simpson's blood to the left of the footprints leaving the scene, but could those blood samples have been contaminated? It was likewise settled that Nicole's blood was on a sock found in Simpson's bedroom, and that Ron Goldman's blood was found in Simpson's Bronco, but perhaps both those samples had been planted? Hair consistent with Simpson's was found in the knit cap at the murder scene and on Ron Goldman's shirt, but hair matches are not one-hundred-per-cent dispositive. The gloves that Nicole bought for Simpson in 1990 were almost certainly the ones used by her killer, but maybe—somehow—not. Our caution and fear, however, misled. The case against Simpson was simply overwhelming. When we said otherwise, we lied to the audience that trusted us.

By contrast, it would have been no exaggeration to say that the defense's case against the police was absurd. In their summations, Cochran and Scheck suggested that the police, in their effort to frame Simpson, had planted at least the following items: (1) Simpson's blood on the rear gate at Bundy; (2) Goldman's blood in Simpson's Bronco; (3) Nicole's blood on the sock (which was found in his bedroom); and (4) the infamous glove at Rockingham, which had, as Clark put it in her summation, "all of the evidence on it: Ron Goldman, fibres from his shirt; Ron Goldman's hair; Nicole's hair; the defendant's blood; Ron Goldman's blood; Nicole's blood; and the Bronco fibre." (Last Wednesday, Simpson understandably decided to forgo a detailed discussion of this evidence when he cancelled his ballyhooed interview with NBC.) The defense never spelled out how all this nefarious activity took place, but to do so would have required more or less the following. The core of the defense case was, of course, that Fuhrman surreptitiously took that glove from the murder scene to the defendant's home. Not only would he have had to transport the glove with its residue of the crime scene, but he would also have had to find some of Simpson's blood (from sources unknown) to deposit upon it and then wipe the glove on the inside of Simpson's locked car (by means unknown)—all the while not knowing whether Simpson had an ironclad alibi for the time of the murders. The other conspirators (conspicuously unnamed) would have had to be equally adept and even more determined. In his contemporaneous notes from the crime scene, Fuhrman wrote that there was blood on the gate at Bundy; someone would have had to wipe that off and apply Simpson's. The autopsies, where blood samples from the victims were taken, were not performed until June 14th, two days after the murders. Someone would have had to take some of Goldman's blood and put it in the Bronco, which was then in police custody. And someone (the same person? another?) would have had to take some of Nicole's blood and dab it on the sock, which was then in a police evidence lab. All of these illegal actions by the police would have had to take place at a time when everyone involved in the case was under the most relentless media scrutiny in American legal history—and all for the benefit of an unknown killer who, like only nine per cent of the population, happened to share Simpson's shoe size, 12.



In the months leading up to the verdict, I was asked approximately ten thou-

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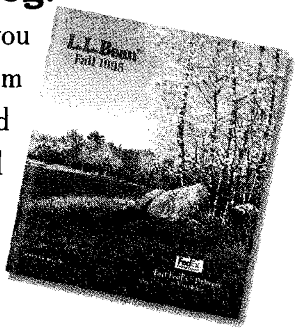

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sand times how I thought the case would end. Of course, the real answer was that I didn't know, but generally I did my duty in the sound-bite culture into which I had willingly propelled myself: Braves in five; Jets with the points; and (my usual guess) Simpson in a hung jury or an acquittal. The jurors' single request to re-hear testimony did throw me. It was after listening to a read-back of the testimony of the limousine driver, Allan Park—which to me was some of the most incriminating evidence in the entire case—that the jurors announced they had reached a verdict. Perhaps, I speculated the night before the verdict was announced, the jury had been watching the same trial that I had after all. In the "Today" panel of "experts" on the morning of the verdict, two of us (including me) predicted conviction, two bet on acquittal.

At ten on Tuesday morning, October 3rd, Judge Ito started court with uncharacteristic promptness. I was in my usual seat—B-11, in the second row, just behind Ron Goldman's sister, Kim. I didn't realize how nervous I would be; I couldn't look at her. It was one thing to do blithe handicapping on a morning news show, but it was another, I then realized, to confront what was before me. Of course, I had talked about an acquittal almost until the end, but, as we sat there waiting for the verdict, it did not occur to me that O. J. Simpson might actually be going home that afternoon. I couldn't believe it. I saw Judge Ito study the verdict forms before he handed them to his clerk, Dierdre Robertson, to read to the public. I noticed that Ito took a long time studying them: it must be a complicated verdict, I inferred—one first-degree conviction, say, and one second-degree. When Robertson first looked at the forms, I thought that her grim demeanor, too, suggested a conviction in the works.

The words when they came—"Not guilty"—went straight into my sinuses. I tried to be a reporter and look at Simpson for his reaction, but I don't remember seeing anything at all. After Robertson intoned her second "Not guilty," Kim Goldman, her father, Fred, and her stepmother, Patti, rocked forward in front of me and howled. I thought how rarely life is like this—a single moment when everything changes. I urged myself to seize it, capture it, write something profound in my notebook. And yet all I could think of was that I knew and understood a lot less than I'd thought I did.

MARCIA CLARK suggested that she and I and a friend of hers meet for lunch at noon on the Friday after the verdict—which was, as it happened, a week to the moment after I had eaten with Shapiro in the C.C.B. cafeteria. She chose an old haunt of hers—the Hamburger Hamlet, on Bonner Drive, in West Hollywood. When I arrived there, with Clark's fellow deputy district attorney Lynn Reed Baragona, we found that the restaurant had been sold—four months before, it turned out—and was undergoing renovations. "Marcia hasn't been getting out a lot lately," Baragona said, laughing.

Clark pulled up a few minutes later. She wore a gray T-shirt, black leggings, and a roomy, black sweatshirt that flopped over her painfully thin frame. Since the verdict on Tuesday, she'd spent a couple of days relaxing with friends and her kids. On Thursday, she and Baragona had prowled the outlet malls in Oxnard and had bought Halloween decorations for their kids at a discount card shop. The toll taken by the months of her exhausting efforts was still apparent. The dark circles under her eyes, which had been so pronounced during her summation, remained very much in evidence. With the Hamburger Hamlet gone, we decided to walk a block west to the considerably more upscale Ivy for lunch. "Time to live it up, eh?" Clark said.

The previous day, CNN had quoted Clark as saying "a majority black jury won't bring a conviction in a case like this." She was furious about that quote. "I didn't say it," she told me, "and I don't believe it." Clark asserts that the reporter garbled a brief off-camera, off-the-record telephone conversation. (CNN stands by the story.) So if the racial composition of the jury wasn't the key issue in the case, I asked her, what was?

Clark paused a long time, and then said, "I haven't sorted it all out, and I don't think it's all that simple." The astonishing brevity of the jury's deliberation seems to have provided a peculiar kind of comfort to her. There appears to have been no one thing the prosecution could have done—or undone—that would have changed the result in the case. She recalled

## DIRECTIVES

Having left the house where the TV wails
you must wait for the moon to sculpt the dogwood
to a statue of frost, for the crêpe myrtle
to catch fire so you can light your hands,
for the chimney's rag of smoke to blind you.
You must open your mouth so that stars
freeze your tongue like snowflakes.
Now you can tell yourself you are a wind
*wholly without body. You can travel*
past trees bowing and shaking their flags,
past hayfields muttering simple prayers.
You can climb slopes of the Blue Ridge
and lose yourself in the dark between stars.
Now there is nothing to do but go back
to the house, nothing to do but whisper
your song of starlight and distances
to your daughter who wails in her crib,
nothing to do but open the window and point
to the red candle flames on the dogwood,
the bones of pepper plants and tomatoes
bending toward cultivated loam, milkweed seeds
parachuting over garbage pails and newspapers
like words that float and take root.

—HENRY HART

that shortly after the verdict her boss, Gil Garcetti, the District Attorney, had asked her what she thought the turning point in the trial was. "I told him there wasn't one," she said. The result, it now seems, was preordained. She has watched the frenzied aftermath of the trial—the juror interviews, the defense-lawyer squabbles—with some detachment. (As for the assertions by various defense lawyers that one or another of their number had discussed the possibility of Simpson's pleading guilty to lesser charges, Clark is emphatic. "I never heard from any of the defense lawyers about a plea bargain," she told me.)

The racial divisions spawned by the case trouble Clark deeply. She is especially rankled by the CNN report, because she believes it may exacerbate these tensions. Now forty-two years old, she came of age in the years of the civil-rights movement, and she remains a political liberal. It astonishes and appalls her that she finds herself a representative of her race in a black-white confrontation. But she is coming to terms with the fact that heightened racial animosity may be the principal legacy of her great moment in the public eye.

I asked Clark what she was going to do next in her life.

"I honestly don't know," she said. "I might stay in the D.A.'s office, and I might not." As it happened, the day before our lunch the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, facing a fiscal crisis, had unilaterally cut the pay of all county employees, including Clark and Baragona, by five per cent. (The board has since reconsidered.) Clark is a divorced parent of two young children. According to press reports, she has signed on as a client of Norman Brokaw, the chairman and chief executive of the William Morris Agency, for help in weighing her options about writing a book, working in television, or otherwise capitalizing on her renown. (Darden has signed on with William Morris as well.)

By the time we left the restaurant, it was apparent that even in these jaded environs Clark has become an enormous celebrity. When we finished lunch, about a dozen customers left their tables to follow Clark into the street—seeking handshakes, autographs, and brief words. An especially persistent face-lifted matron subjected Clark to a lengthy and mysterious harangue. After the woman was safely out of earshot, a measure of Clark's frustration surfaced. Brentwood, after all, was her Waterloo. Rolling her eyes, amused rather than despondent, Clark told Baragona, "I've had enough of West L.A."

For several years before the Simpson case, Clark and Baragona had made weekly pilgrimages to this neighborhood to have lunch and visit the Mysterious Bookshop, an L.A. landmark. The two women read and swap the novels they buy there, with their tales of tidy mayhem, and they wanted to resume this ritual. I had to catch my plane for New York and couldn't join them, but I did ask Clark what she wanted to read. She was full of enthusiasm, as eager to browse in the store as to get on to the next chapter in her life. She reeled off a string of authors who were unfamiliar to me—chroniclers of maniacal serial murderers, wily medical examiners, and the like. As I walked away, she added that, as was her custom, she would be avoiding one part of the store. "No true crime," Clark said. "I only want fake crime these days, thanks." ♦

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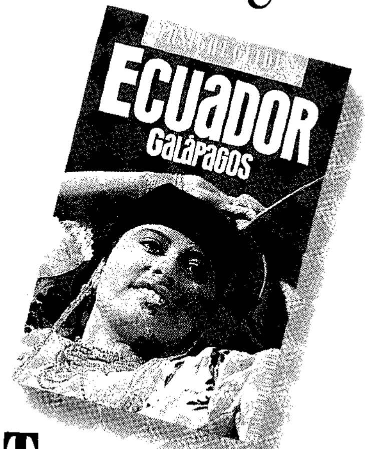

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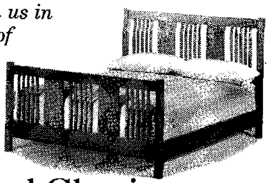

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# THE SUPERNOTE

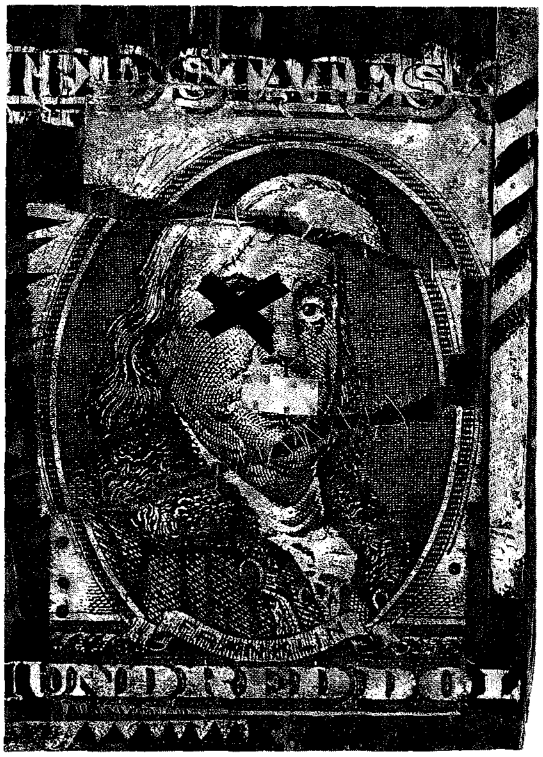
*A near-perfect counterfeit hundred-dollar bill is coming out of the Middle East. Is it an act of economic terrorism? And can the Treasury stop it?*

BY FREDRIC DANNEN AND IRA SILVERMAN

In the spring of 1992, two Lebanese-born drug traffickers found themselves in jail in Massachusetts, and their prospects looked grim. Gebran Hanna, of Ottawa, and Peter Kattar, of Andover, Massachusetts, had shipped more than three tons of hashish, concealed in plastic barrels of olives, from the Bekaa Valley, in Lebanon, to Boston Harbor, and they were caught. If they were convicted, they would likely face mandatory sentences of thirty years or more. Their only hope for clemency was to coöperate with the government of the United States, and provide useful information. As it happened, they knew about something big.

Hanna was escorted to the office of Paul Kelly, the Boston federal prosecutor who had brought the hashish case. After Kelly, a slim blond man in his thirties, and an agent of the United States Customs Service interrogated him about the drug business, Hanna suddenly changed the subject. Was the government interested in learning about a counterfeit United States hundred-dollar bill of remarkable quality being printed in Lebanon? Hanna said he had inside knowledge of the operation, and offered to direct his brother, who lived in Ottawa, to travel to Beirut and obtain samples. Kelly was skeptical but interested. "We said, 'Fine. Do that,' " he recalls. As had been arranged, the brother stopped at Logan Airport on his way back from Lebanon, and there he met the customs agent and turned over five bills.

Kelly was stunned when the bills were presented to him. Two of them did not appear to be fraudulent. "I've done counterfeiting cases, and I know what a counterfeit bill looks like," he says. "These bills looked genuine. They felt genuine. I said, 'If these are counterfeit, this is a serious problem for the United States.' " Kelly immediately called the Boston office of the United States Secret Service, a branch of the Treasury. "I said, 'We have some outstanding-looking bills, and they came from Lebanon,' " he recalls. "Secret Service was at our door in three and a half minutes. They knew exactly what I was talking about."



*The Supernote: Singularly poised to damage world confidence in the dollar?*

ANTHONY FREDA

Kelly, it turned out, had obtained samples of a counterfeit hundred-dollar bill that had been dubbed the Supernote. It had surfaced around 1990 and originated in the Middle East, and, the agents told Kelly, as far as they could determine between two and three billion dollars' worth had been printed in two years. It was indeed no ordinary counterfeit. Most fake currency is printed on an offset press—the type used for books and magazines—and it tends to look and feel flat. The Supernote, however, was being manufactured by the same industrial process used to make authentic United States currency, known as intaglio printing, in which an etched plate meets paper with tremendous force, giving the note a distinctive, embossed feel. The paper used for the Supernote was an uncanny replica of the currency stock produced exclusively for the United States government since 1879 by Crane & Company, of Dalton, Massachusetts—seventy-five per cent cotton, twenty-five per cent linen, with embedded red and blue fibres.

The workmanship of the Supernote was extraordinary. It had sequential serial numbers, and the printing plates continued to be refined. A Secret Service agent identified Kelly's two samples as Supernotes by three minuscule imperfections. Even when the flaws were pointed out, Kelly says, "I frankly couldn't see the damn imperfections." (A former employee of the Secret Service's forensic division says that when a sample of the Supernote first arrived at the agency's laboratory, in Washington, a top technical analyst "examined it the way he has every other counterfeit note in the world, and called it genuine.")

Most alarming of all, the Supernote was so well engineered that it could fool currency scanners at the nation's twelve Federal Reserve banks. The black ink on the front of American currency contains ferrous oxide, which is magnetic, and the Fed's scanners read the magnetic field down the center line of the portrait with such precision that a thousand genuine hundred-dollar bills are rejected for every one that is later found to be counterfeit. Yet, Kelly recalls, "Secret Service told me the bills went through those machines."

The Supernote, Kelly learned, had been circulating in Europe, the Far East, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union, but only a limited supply had reached the United States. This was not reassuring. Of the almost three hundred and ninety billion dollars in American paper money now in existence, some two-thirds, or more than two hundred and fifty billion, is in foreign hands. The worldwide popularity of the dollar is a tremendous boon to the United States. As the Federal Reserve is fond of pointing out, every bill in circulation is in effect an interest-free loan; an equivalent amount in government securities would cost the United States more than twenty-five billion dollars in annual interest payments. The beauty of bills stuffed in a mattress in Kazakhstan, for instance, is the good chance that the notes will never be called in. The Supernote was by no means the first foreign-made or foreign-distributed counterfeit of American currency, but because of its frightening and unprecedented quality it seemed singularly poised to damage world confidence in the dollar.

IN general, foreign counterfeiting of American paper money is an enforcement quandary for the Secret Service, which is essentially a domestic police force. At home, its anti-counterfeiting record is exemplary; by tracking suspicious purchases of paper and ink, the Service is able to seize more than ninety per cent of the counterfeit money that is printed in the United States before it can be distributed. Only a fraction of the Service's two thousand agents are stationed abroad, however, and to make cases outside the United States the agency depends heavily on foreign law enforcement. In Thailand in 1985, for example, with the aid of the Royal Thai Police, the Service tracked down Lee Ah-sin, nicknamed King Kong, an eccentric, obsessively meticulous Malaysian-born engraver who manufactured an outstanding hundred-dollar bill using a converted squid-processor as a press.

The Supernote was clearly not the work of an eccentric. It appeared instead to be the Secret Service's worst nightmare: an industrial-level counterfeit printed in a hostile region of the world. What's more, there was evidence that the printing operation was protected by the military of Syria, an essentially hostile government. The Secret Service agents, Kelly recalls, envisioned the Supernote facility as "a barn or a big warehouse" with multiple presses, either in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley of Lebanon—the notorious badlands of the Middle East, where drugs are harvested and terrorist groups conduct field exercises—or in Syria itself, but in either case guarded by Syrian soldiers. That scenario raised another ugly possibility—that the Supernote was a form of state-protected terrorism, a charge that would not be new to Syria. "The Secret Service did believe that this was an effort not just to acquire amazing wealth but also to destabilize the

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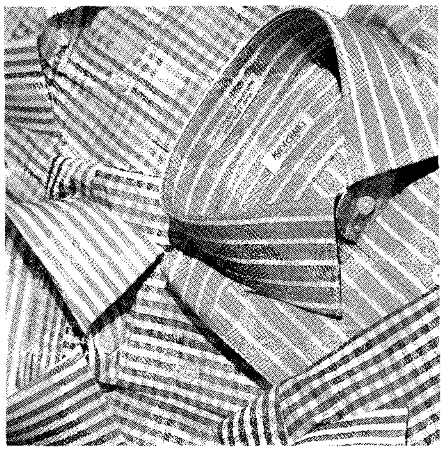

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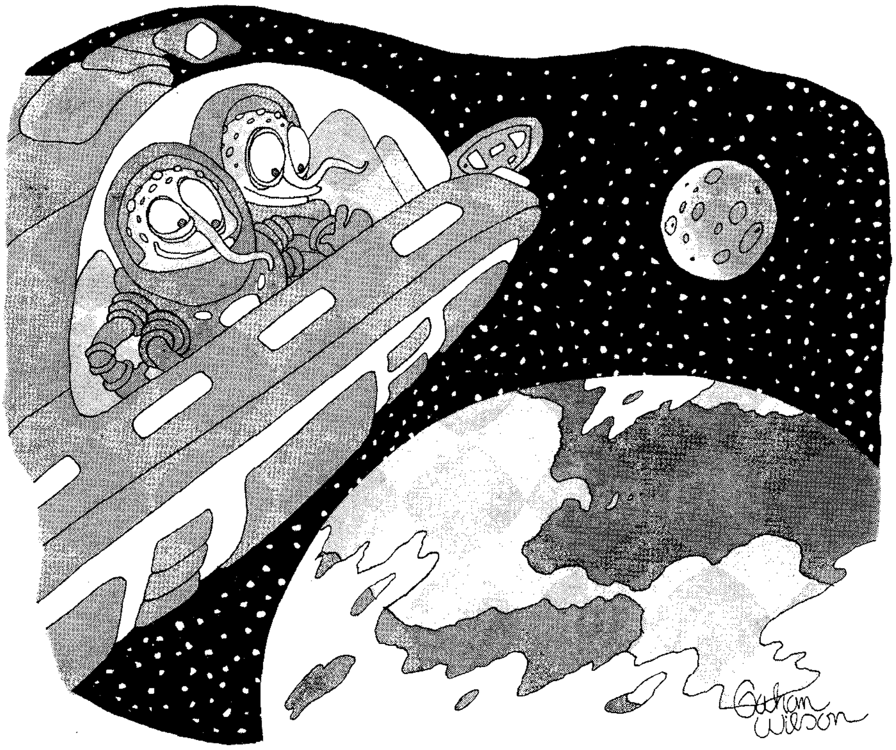

*"Another decade or so, and it'll be warm enough for us."*

• •

economy of the United States," Kelly says.

The Secret Service had done its best to investigate the Supernote, and earlier in 1992 it had set up a task force in Cyprus. If the agency could locate the printing facility, Kelly was now told, that information would be turned over to the United States military or intelligence services. The Secret Service was eager to speak to Gebran Hanna and Peter Kattar, the hashish smugglers, and a meeting was arranged at the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Hanna and Kattar said that, as they understood it, the counterfeit operation had begun in Lebanon in the mid-seventies, during the civil war between Christian Phalangists and Muslims. The Phalangists, who were short of money, conscripted skilled Armenian engravers to make the plates of a counterfeit United States hundred, and this was printed on the bleached paper of genuine one-dollar bills. The counterfeits, though imperfect, were successfully passed in Czechoslovakia to buy rifles. Years later, according to Hanna and Kattar, high-ranking officials of the Syrian military in Lebanon took control of the counterfeiting operation, and the Supernote was developed, although counterfeit hundreds of lesser quality also continued to be produced. Hanna and Kattar said that they knew of three printing facilities in Lebanon, and that the counterfeit hundreds were transported via drug routes—in trucks passing through Turkey to Europe and in ships from the Lebanese port of Juniyah to Cyprus.

The debriefing sessions with Hanna and Kattar lasted several months. In February, 1993, the two men pleaded guilty to the hashish conspiracy and were sentenced, Hanna to eight years in prison and Kattar to ten. Both men were given lighter sentences in return for their information about counterfeiting and about other items of interest to the government. With that, Kelly's involvement in the Supernote investigation came to an end, but what he had learned from the Secret Service continued to trouble him. "I'm here in Boston prosecuting drug traffickers and murderers, but this was several notches above anything I'd seen before," he says. "It seemed to me a tremendous problem for the country."

KELLY has been proved right. Today, the Supernote remains one of the longest unsolved counterfeiting cases in the modern history of the Secret Service, and it has begun to undermine international confidence in United States currency. Its rate of manufacture appears prodigious; in the Russian Federation alone, where the dollar has supplanted the unstable ruble as the primary currency, the Russian Central Bank estimates that the volume of Supernotes is as high as four billion dollars. And because of the possibility of economic terrorism as a motive for the Supernote, the full dimensions of the problem are not yet known.

It is a problem that has not been widely or accurately reported. To date, the few press accounts of the Supernote have mostly been based on a July, 1992, report of the House Republican Research Committee Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare. The report blamed Syria and Iran for distributing the Supernote, and stated that it was actually being printed by the government of Iran at the mint in Teheran—charges that Iran called "wild hallucinations of the extreme right."

Indeed, the theory expressed to Paul Kelly by the Secret Service agents in 1992—that the Supernote facility is in either Lebanon or Syria, and is protected by the Syrian military—is now considered fact by many at the State Department, according to insiders. A counterfeit hundred of lesser quality is also being printed in the same region. State Department sources say that a diplomatic solution to the Supernote problem has been sought in several discussions with the Syrian government, including a May, 1994, meeting between Warren Christopher and the Syrian President, Hafiz al-Assad. The State Department is hindered in those discussions, however, by the slow progress of the Supernote investigation on the part of the Secret Service; without knowing the precise location of the printing operation, one source says, "it's difficult to pound the table."

The Secret Service, meanwhile, may not be altogether to blame for its lack of progress on the Supernote. It has apparently been held back by a curious policy decision of the United States Treasury, which has often been accused of being a schizophrenic institution—part banker, part cop. In dealing with the Supernote, the banker constituency evidently has set the agenda. The Treasury, taking its cue from the Federal Reserve, has a difficult time regarding counterfeiting, even on a very large scale, as a macroeconomic problem, because cash is a relatively small percentage of the total money supply. Wire transfers, checks, and credit-card transactions, after all, run into the trillions. Counterfeiting becomes significant to the Fed only if it undermines confidence in the dollar.

Dozens of interviews with high-level insiders left the impression that the Federal Reserve and the Treasury don't fear the Supernote itself as much as they fear a confidence problem that might result if they publicly acknowledge it and countenance a large-scale investigation. (As one expert on international terrorism who has looked into the Supernote puts it, "If the note is that nearly perfect, it doesn't exist.") Last March, the Secret Service briefed the Senate Appropriations Committee on its foreign enforcement problems, and the committee, deeply concerned, urged a significant increase of Secret Service agents overseas. In late August, the Service finally won approval to open its first permanent office in the Middle East, in Cyprus.

The Treasury's efforts to keep the existence of the Supernote quiet have failed. After five years of Supernote production, merchants and bank tellers in many foreign cities, notably in Europe and the Far East, are increasingly reluctant to accept hundred-dollar bills. In August of 1994, for example, the columnist Liz Smith noted that "top banks" in London would not exchange pound notes for hundreds because of concern about a counterfeit, which, they suspected, came from the Middle East. Last February, the Hong Kong *Standard* reported that a rash of counterfeit hundreds had hit that city. Senator Patrick Leahy, who serves on the Banking Committee, complained recently that while he was on vacation in Ireland this summer establishments would sooner accept his traveller's checks than his hundreds. Similar problems have been reported in Greece.

Finally, last month, the Treasury did take action on the Supernote—though without ever once publicly mentioning it. At a press conference notable for its levity (introductory remarks were delivered by an actor dressed as Ben Franklin), Robert E. Rubin, the Secretary of the Treasury, announced the first significant redesign of American currency since 1929, to commence next year with a new hundred-dollar bill. Among the modifications are a larger, off-center portrait, a watermark, and a patch of ink that shifts from green to black when viewed from different angles. Rubin insisted that the

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redesign had been prompted not by any existing problem but, rather, by the "future and potential threat" of counterfeiting posed by color photocopiers, digital scanners, and color laser printers. He described the amount of counterfeit currency now in existence as "de minimis" and "not an economic problem," and asserted that the redesign was an example of "anticipating a problem" and "staying ahead of the curve."

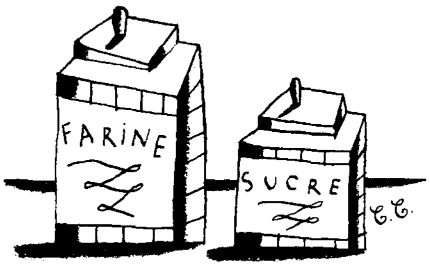
It remains to be seen just how effective a solution the currency redesign will be. Even if the Middle Eastern counterfeiters cannot duplicate the new hundred, they can continue to cause damage for some time with the old. The Treasury has a policy of never recalling existing currency, for fear that the world's hoarders of dollars might switch to Deutsche marks or yen. Eventually, a market preference for the new hundred, and the replacement of old bills as they pass through the Federal Reserve system, is expected to drive the old one out of existence, but that could take years. In the meantime, Mary Ellen Withrow, the Treasurer of the United States, emphasizes that "we will have two kinds of money circulating at the same time, the old and the new—and they both will be good."

While the threat of widespread amateur counterfeiting on color reprographic equipment is indeed serious, it is far-fetched to think that that threat alone prompted the currency redesign. Since 1990, hundreds and fifties have had two anti-reprographic features: a translucent polymer thread embedded in the paper, and microprinting around the portrait. By 1993, the thread and the microprinting had been added to twenties, tens, and fives. Even those features, which did virtually nothing to alter the look of the currency, took years to implement. Redesign like the one announced last month is a radical step for the Treasury, which believes that the consistent look of green-and-black American currency conveys its stability. Many politicians, meanwhile, have long held that a dramatic redesign of the currency would be highly offensive to the American public—like changing the flag. While other nations regularly alter their currency—Great Britain, for example, has remade the pound note six times since 1914—the printing plates of American paper money have changed so little since 1929 that on the back of a new ten-dollar bill the car driving by the Treasury Building is of Model T vintage.

Needless to say, the consistency of those printing plates is a benefit to counterfeiters. Back in 1981, the Secret Service began agitating for a full-scale redesign of the currency, out of concern that United States paper money might be vulnerable not merely to amateur reprography but to an industrial-level counterfeiting problem like the Supernote. Officials of the Secret Service pressed for more than a dozen anti-counterfeiting features, including holograms, chemical markers, and the use of multiple colors, a standard feature in major currencies throughout the world.

In 1984, after three years of study and experimentation, the Secret Service and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had developed three prototype twenty-dollar bills, all with multicolored printing. Robert Leuver, the director of the B.E.P. at the time, says he brought the prototypes to Donald Regan, the Treasury Secretary, who then took them to the White House. "They didn't float," Leuver recalls Regan telling him. Early the next year, James Baker replaced Regan as Treasury Secretary, and representatives of both the B.E.P. and the Secret Service showed the prototypes to Baker's deputy, Richard Darman, who, one of those representatives says, flatly rejected them. In 1986, Baker finally approved only two new features—the polymer thread and the microprinting. The Secret Service made it clear that it considered the changes insufficient protection against various types of counterfeiting, and received assurances from the Treasury that other changes would come soon.

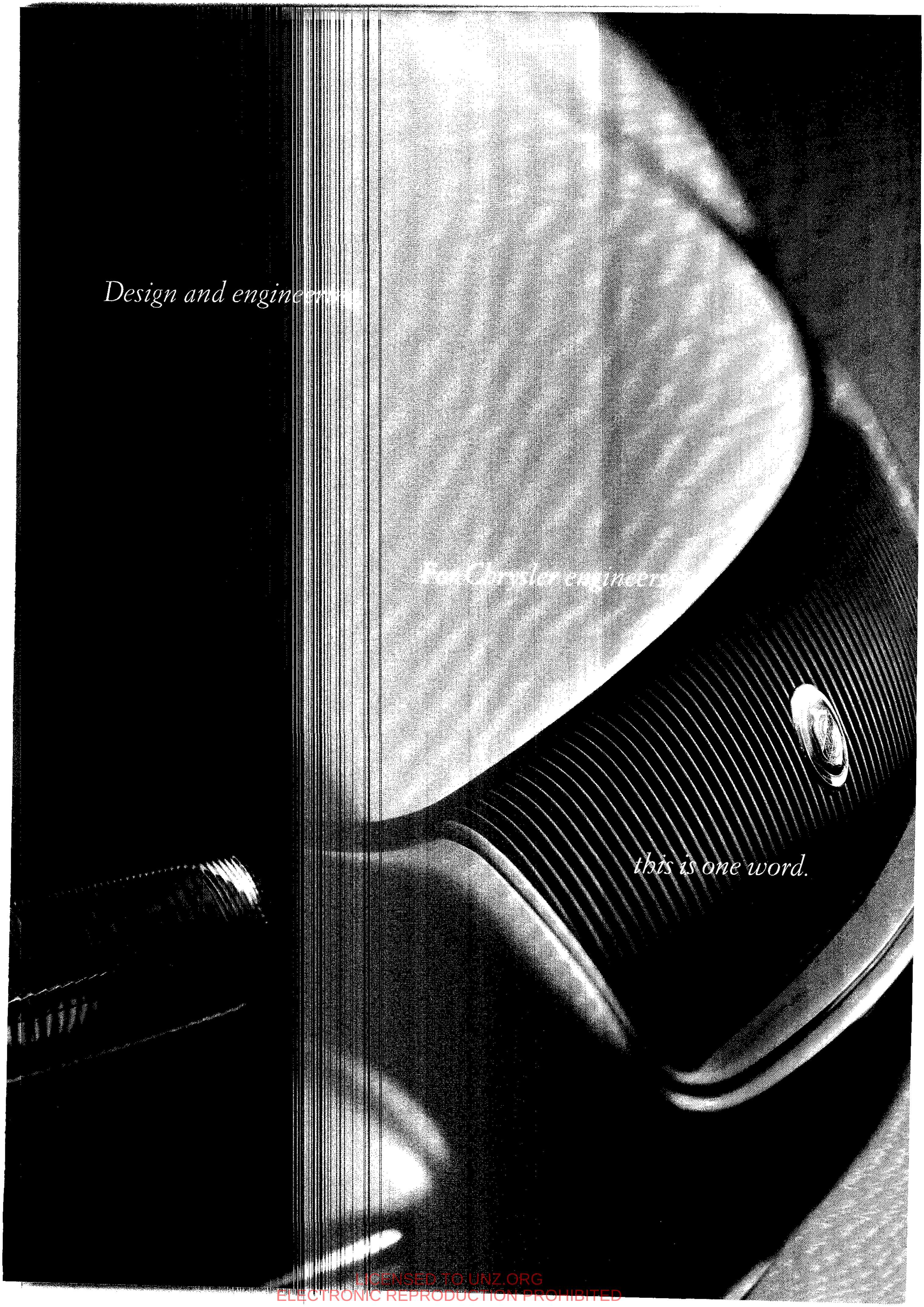
As it turned out, even the new features approved by Baker did not begin to take effect until 1990. Crane & Company, the exclusive supplier of American currency paper, was initially unable to master the technical difficulties of embedding a polymer thread, and in 1986 the B.E.P. was forced to seek other bidders. The most promising new supplier, Portals Ltd., a British paper manufacturer, was knocked out of the running the following year, however, when Massachusetts Representative Silvio Conte, a close friend of Crane's late chairman, put through an amendment to an appropriations bill requiring that American currency paper be supplied by an American-owned concern. Crane got another chance to produce paper with an embedded thread, and finally succeeded in 1989.



The Treasury's reluctance to alter the traditional look of the currency is apparent even in the redesign that is to take effect next year. Secretary Rubin stresses that the new currency "retains the basic American feel and look"—it will be printed on the same Crane paper, of the same size, and in the same two colors. Mary Ellen Withrow, the Treasurer, says that the use of additional colors was never seriously considered. "Green is the color of prosperity, and black is a good thing, too—it shows we're sound and solid and in the black," she says.

The Treasury remains obsessively secretive about the Supernote, to the point of denial. At a hearing before the House Banking Committee last year, Guy Caputo, then the deputy director of the Secret Service, would not confirm the existence of a high-quality Middle Eastern counterfeit; nor would Ronald K. Noble, the Treasury's under-secretary for enforcement, in an interview for this account. In late August, Theodore E. Allison, assistant to the board of governors of the Federal Reserve, insisted, unblinkingly, "We've talked to thirty Russian banks in the past month, and they don't have any problems with counterfeits. . . . There's no sign of it."

Allison's statement was an astounding one, considering that on September 13th Viktor Melnikov, the director of foreign-currency regulation and control for the Russian Central Bank, met with representatives of the State Department and described a Supernote epidemic in his country. Melnikov, whose observations were reported in a cable to the State Department from the American Embassy in Moscow, said the Central Bank had calculated that the people of Russia were holding between fifteen and twenty billion dollars—more dollars than rubles—and that the American hundred was an especially popular denomination. Unfortunately, he said, between fifteen and twenty per cent of those dollars were believed to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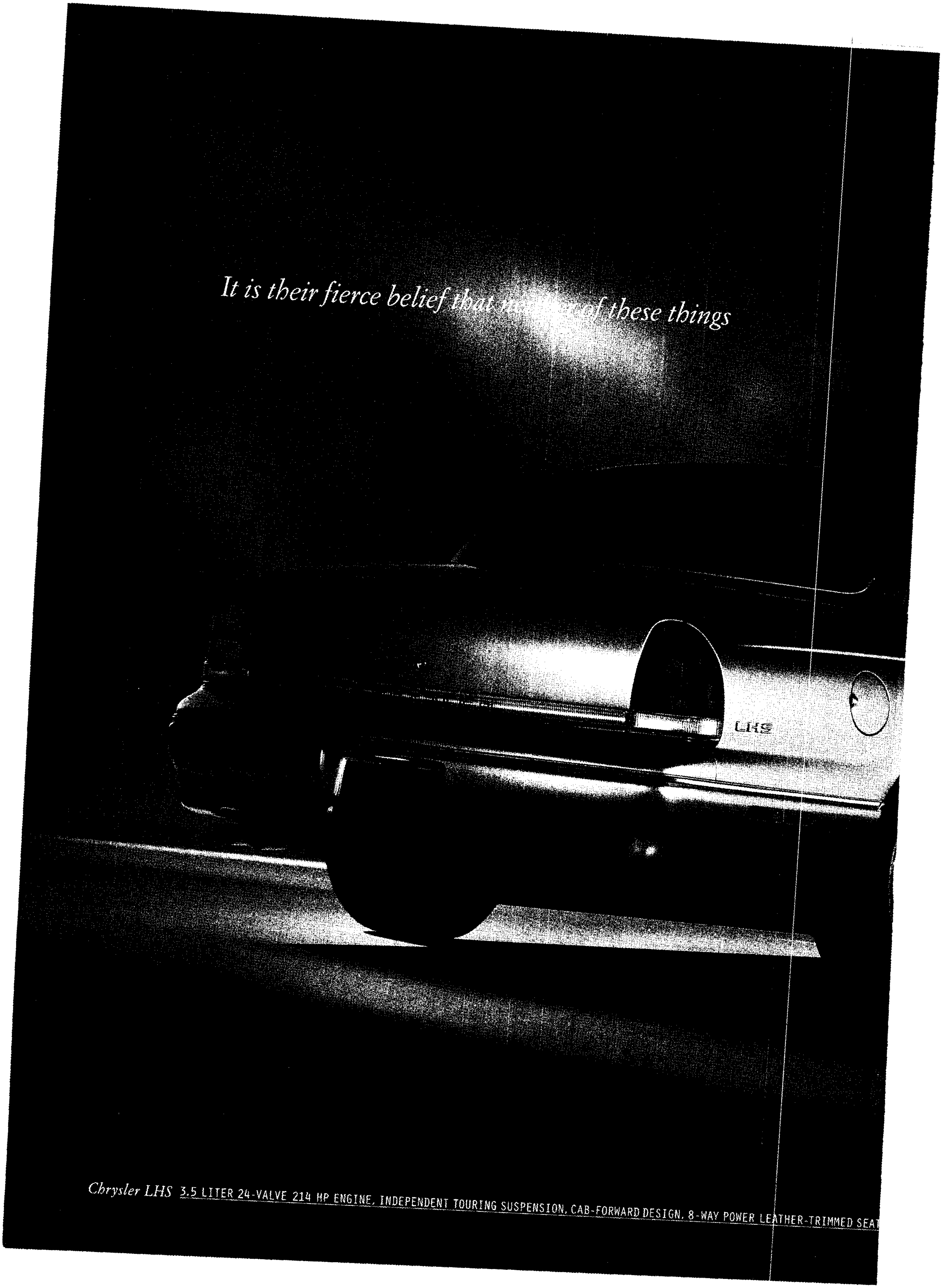
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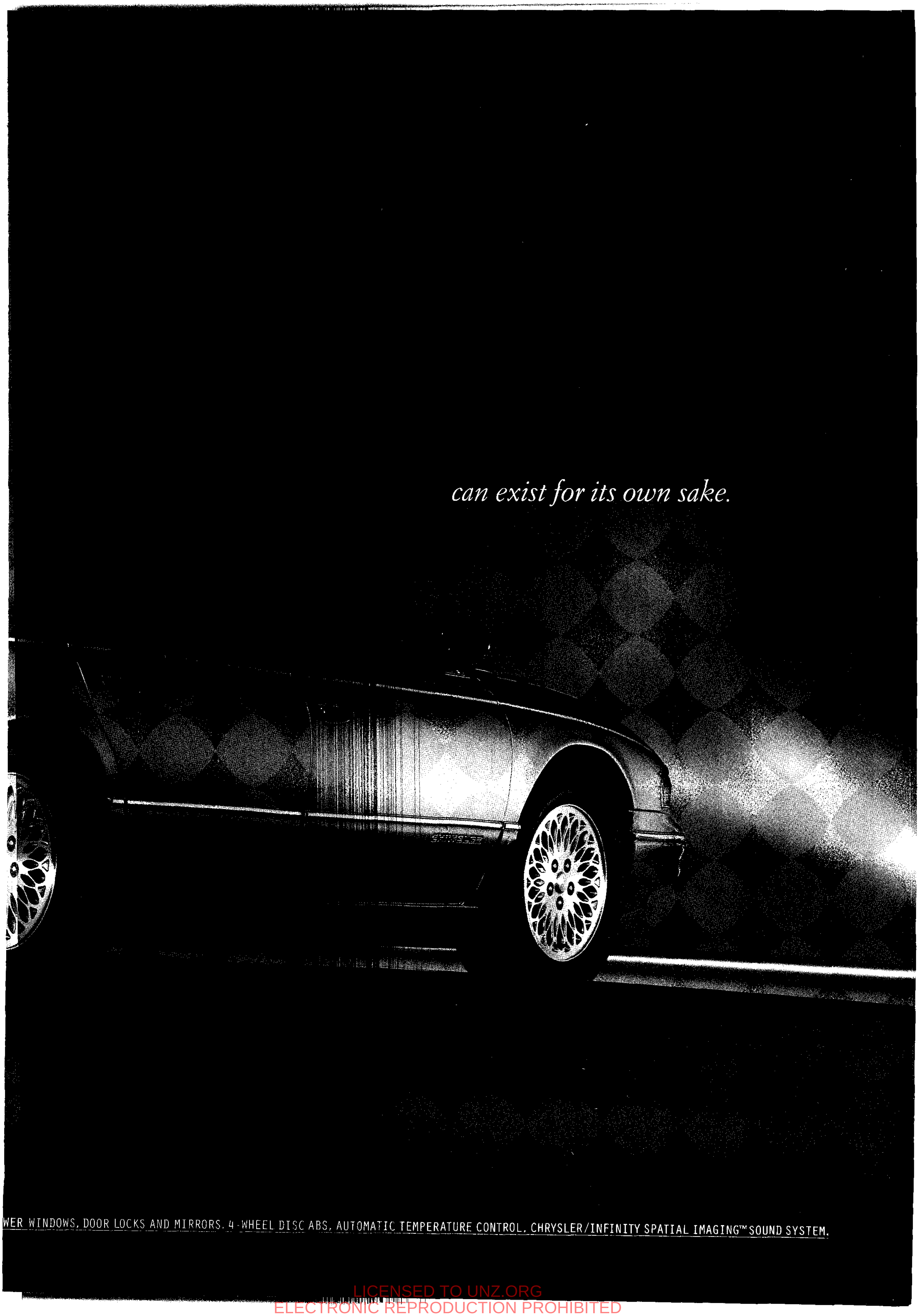
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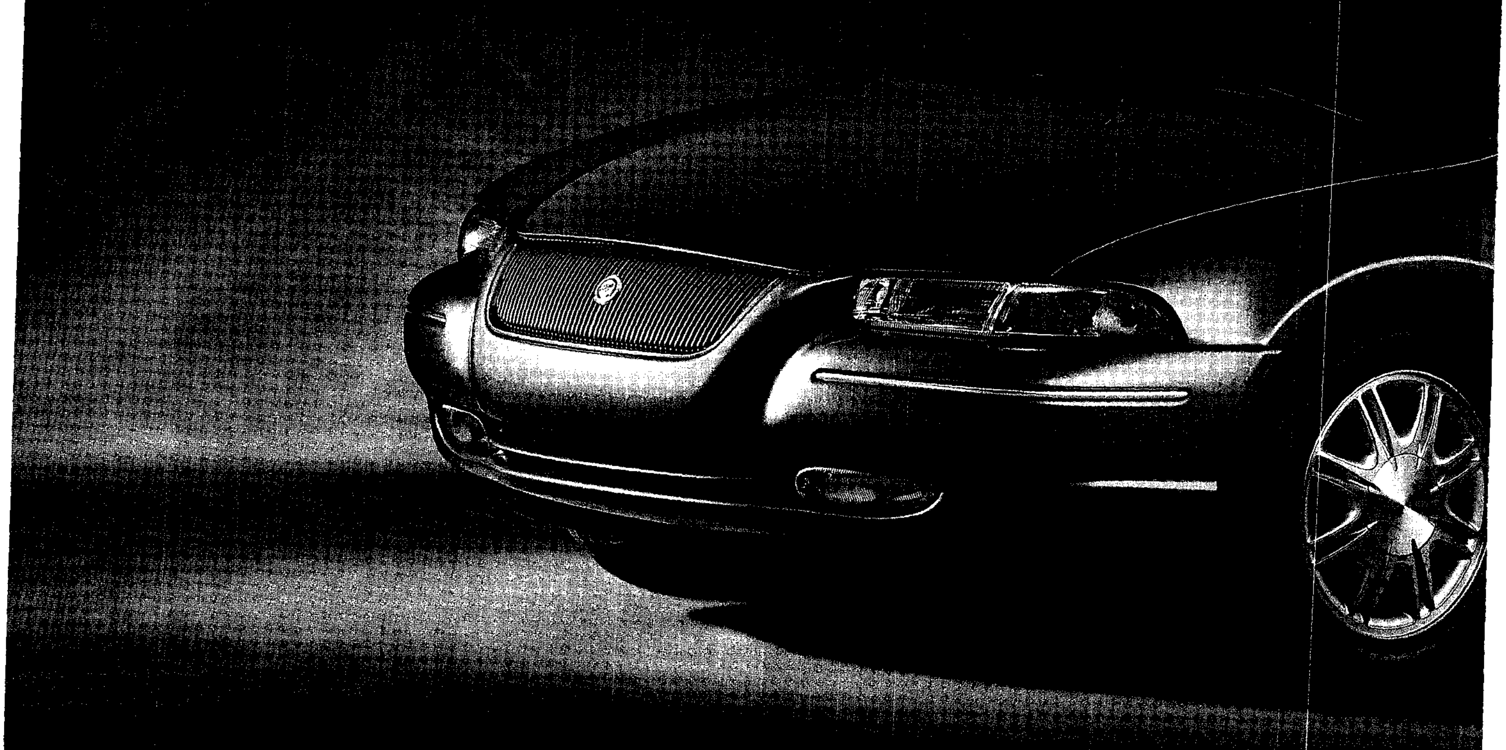

*The constant recognition*

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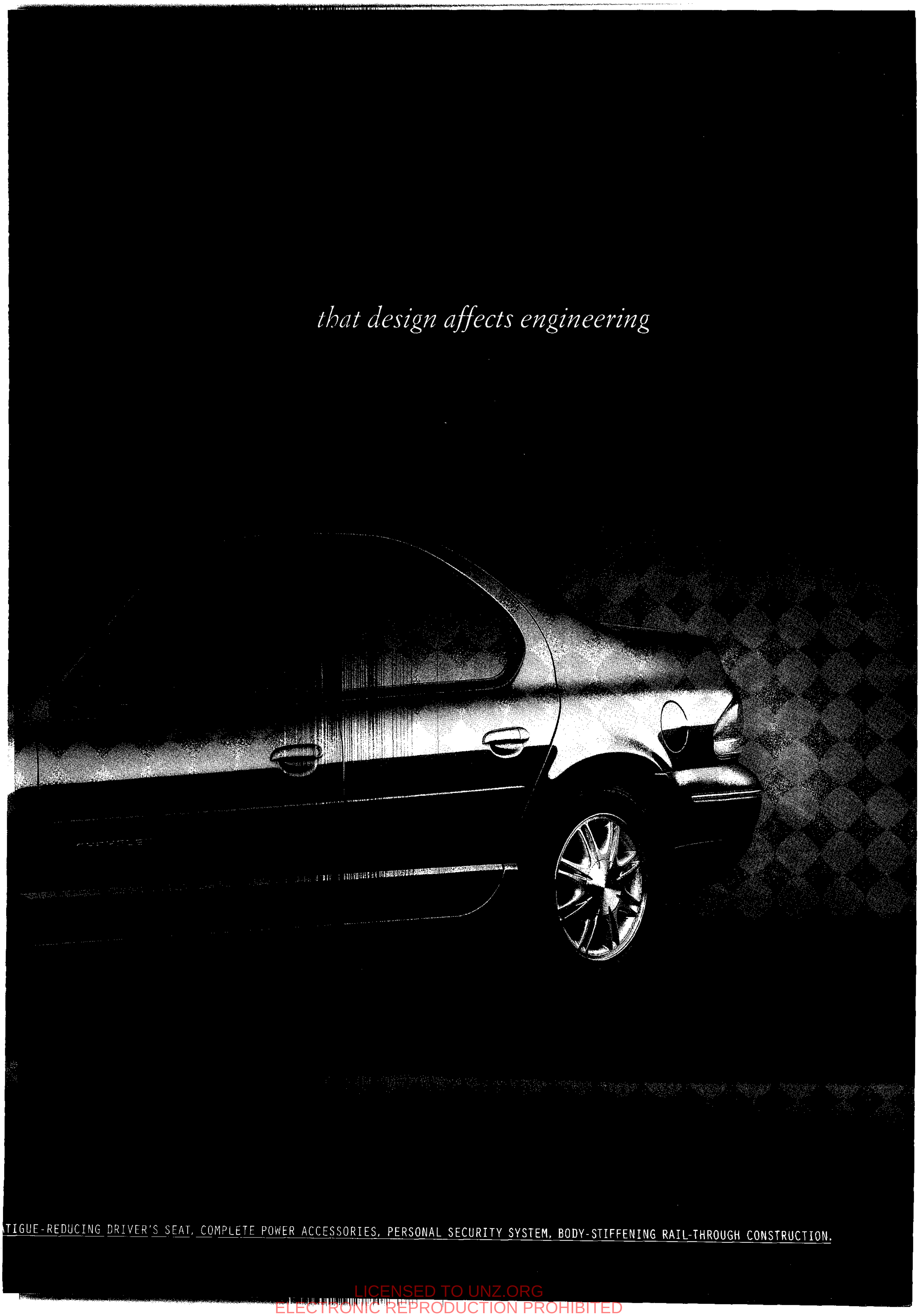
that design affects engineering
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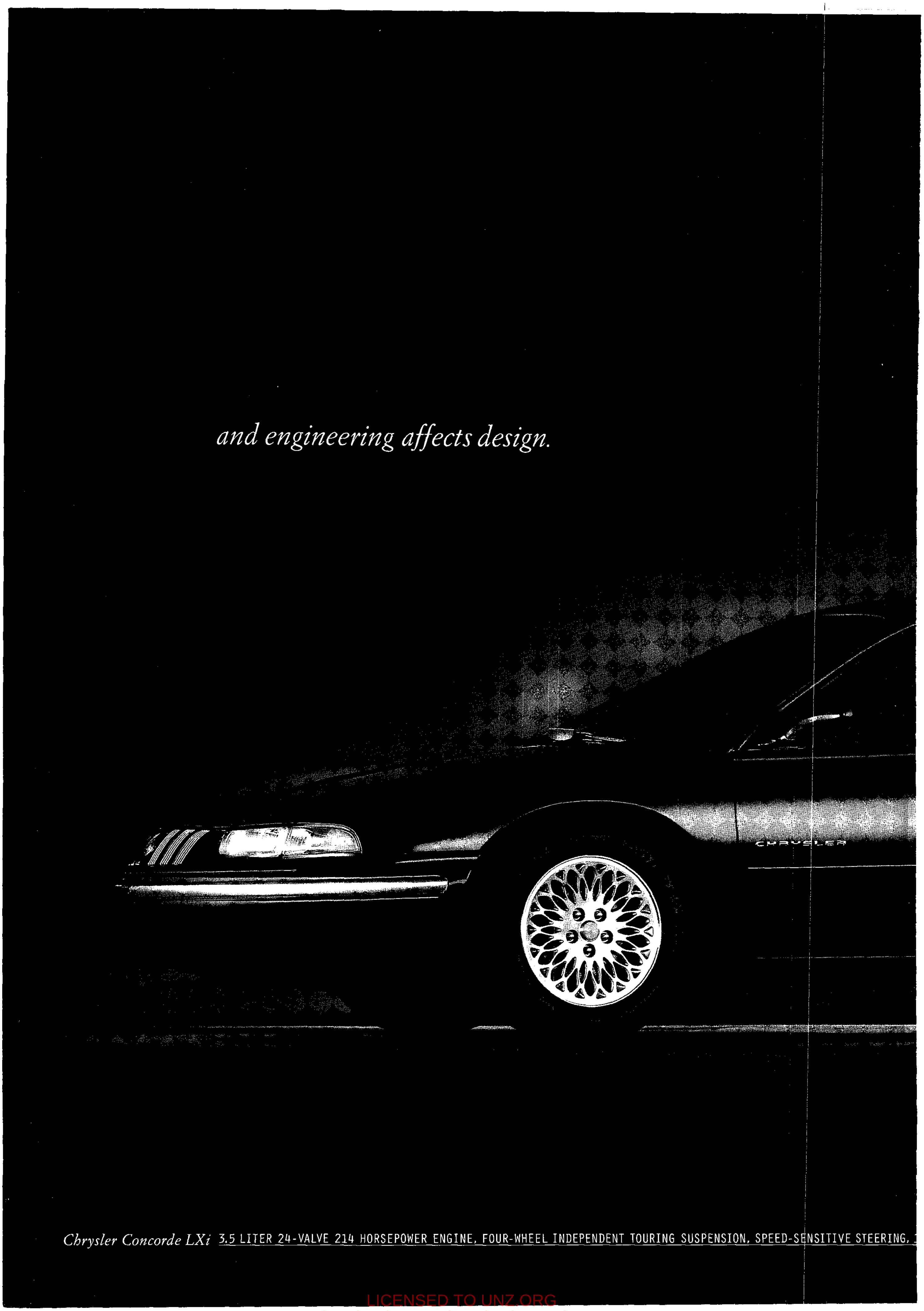
and engineering affects design.
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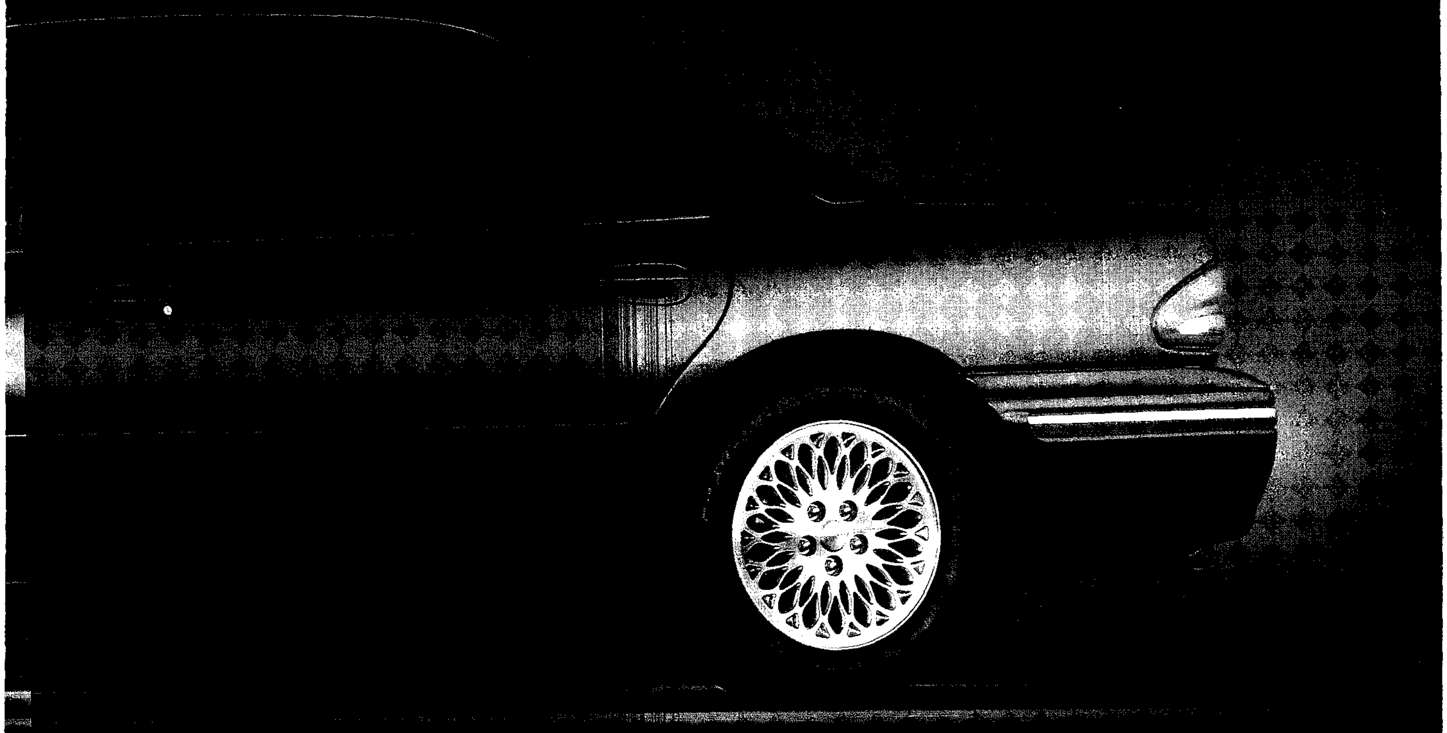
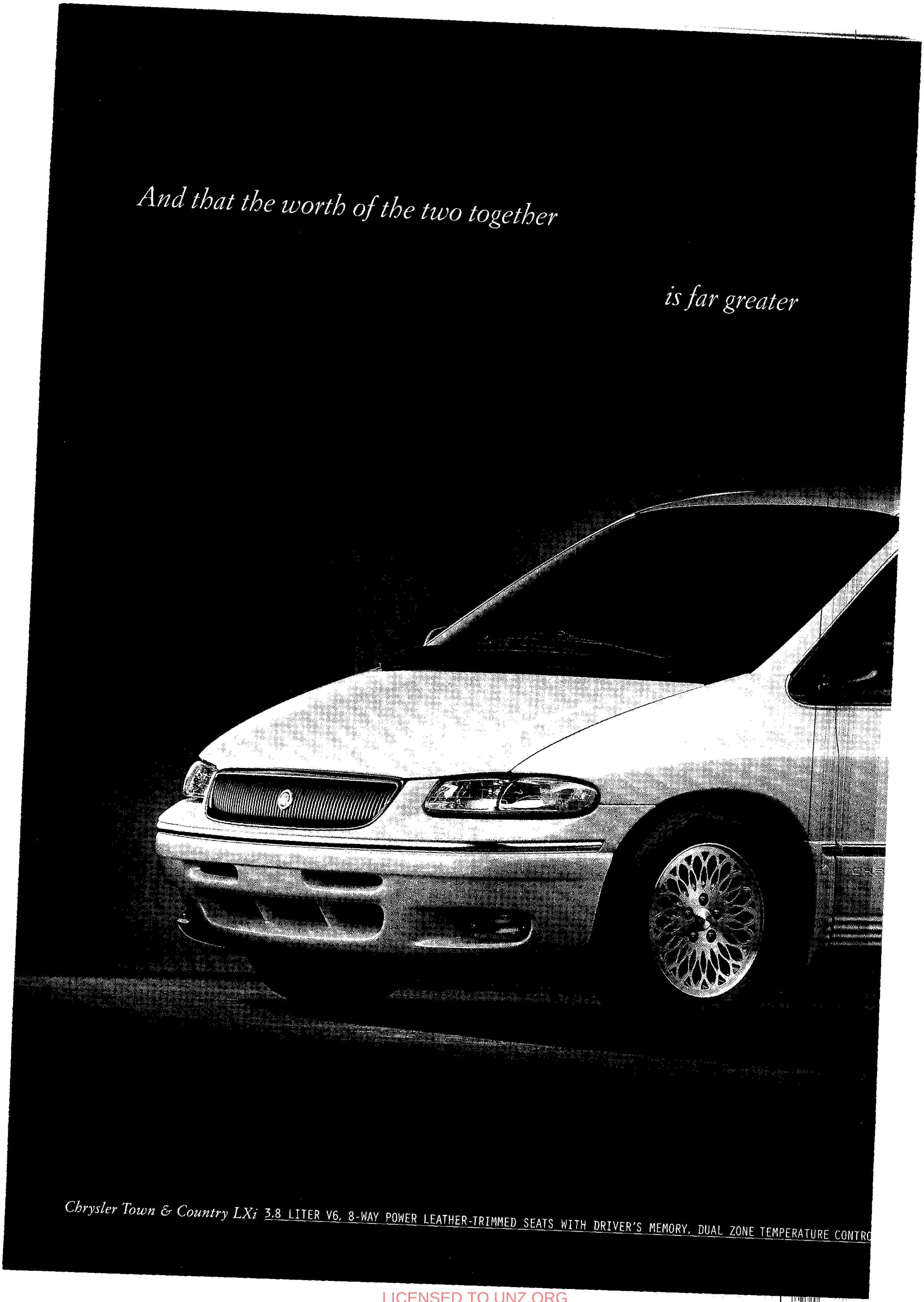


T ALUMINUM WHEELS, FOUR-WHEEL DISC ABS, LEATHER-TRIMMED SEATS, ELEVEN-SPEAKER PREMIUM SOUND SYSTEM, CAB-FORWARD DESIGN.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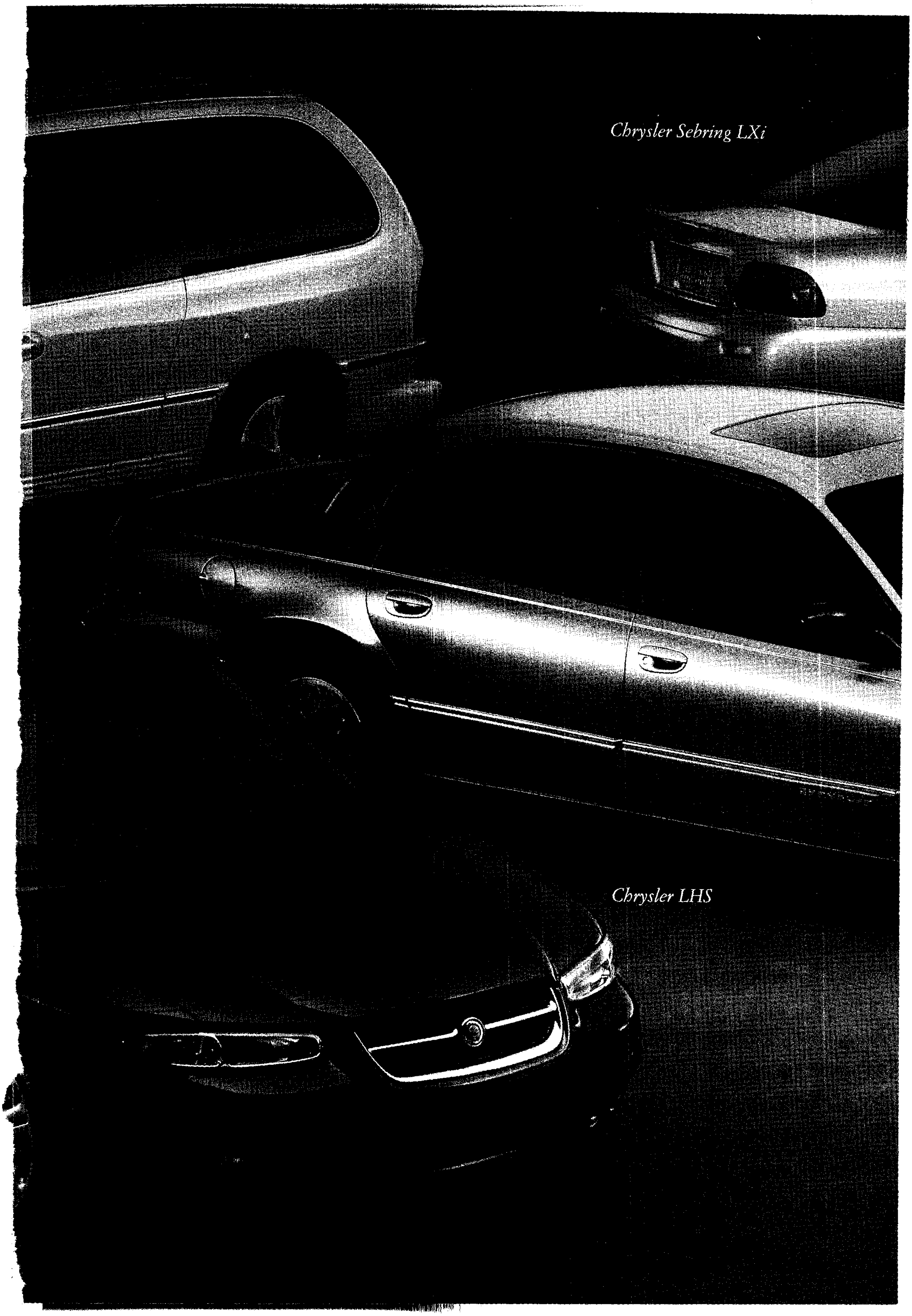
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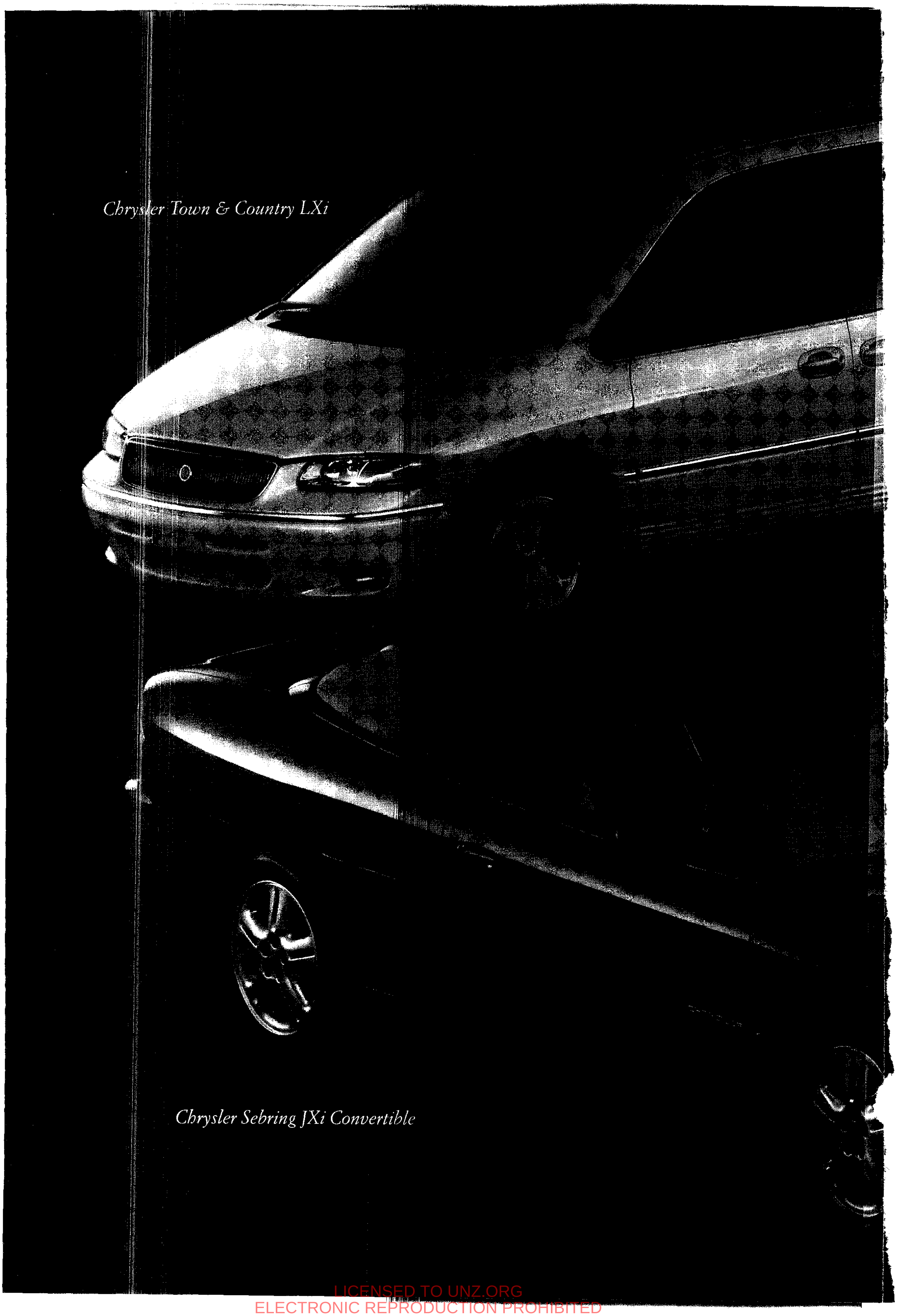
*Chrysler Town & Country LXi*
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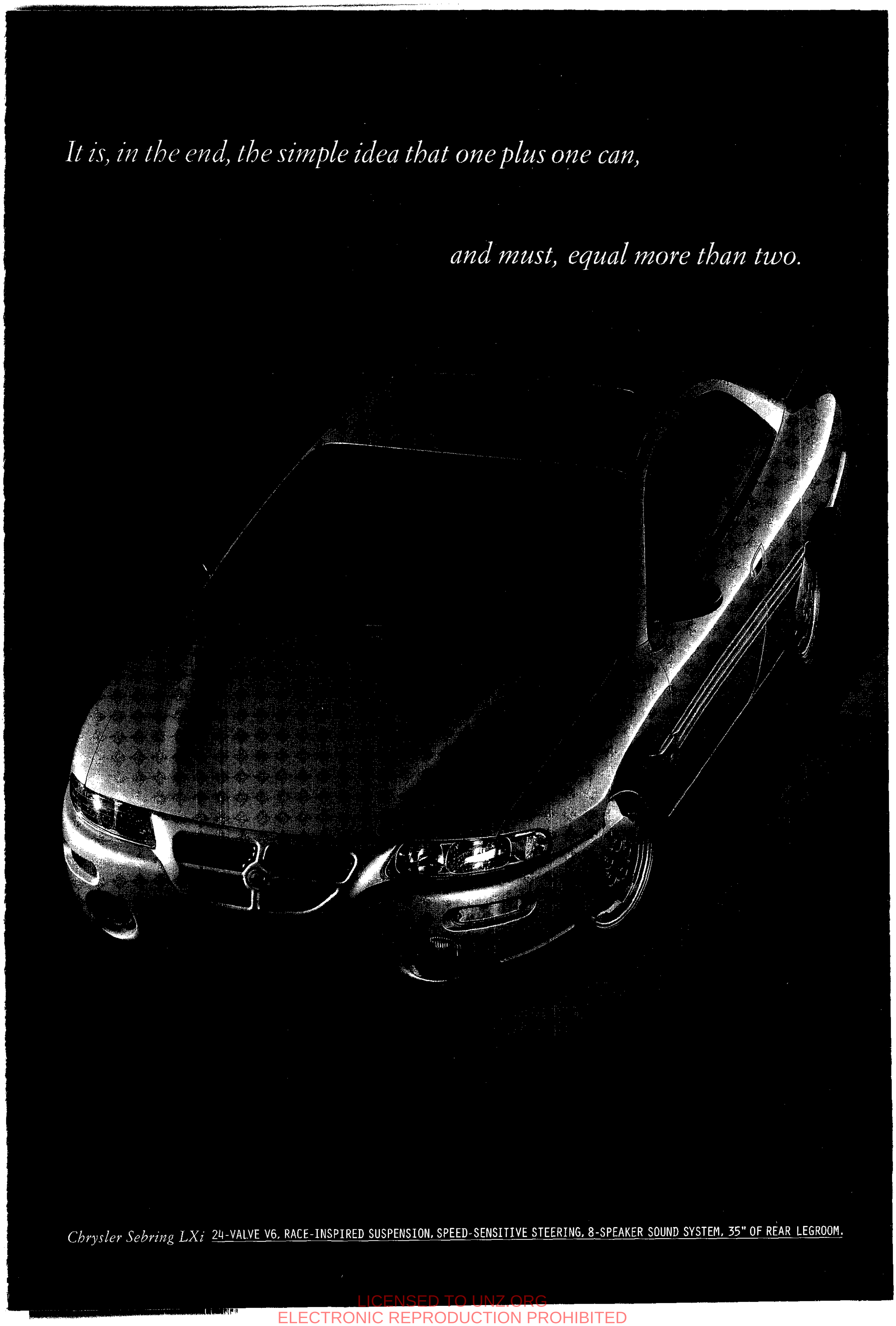
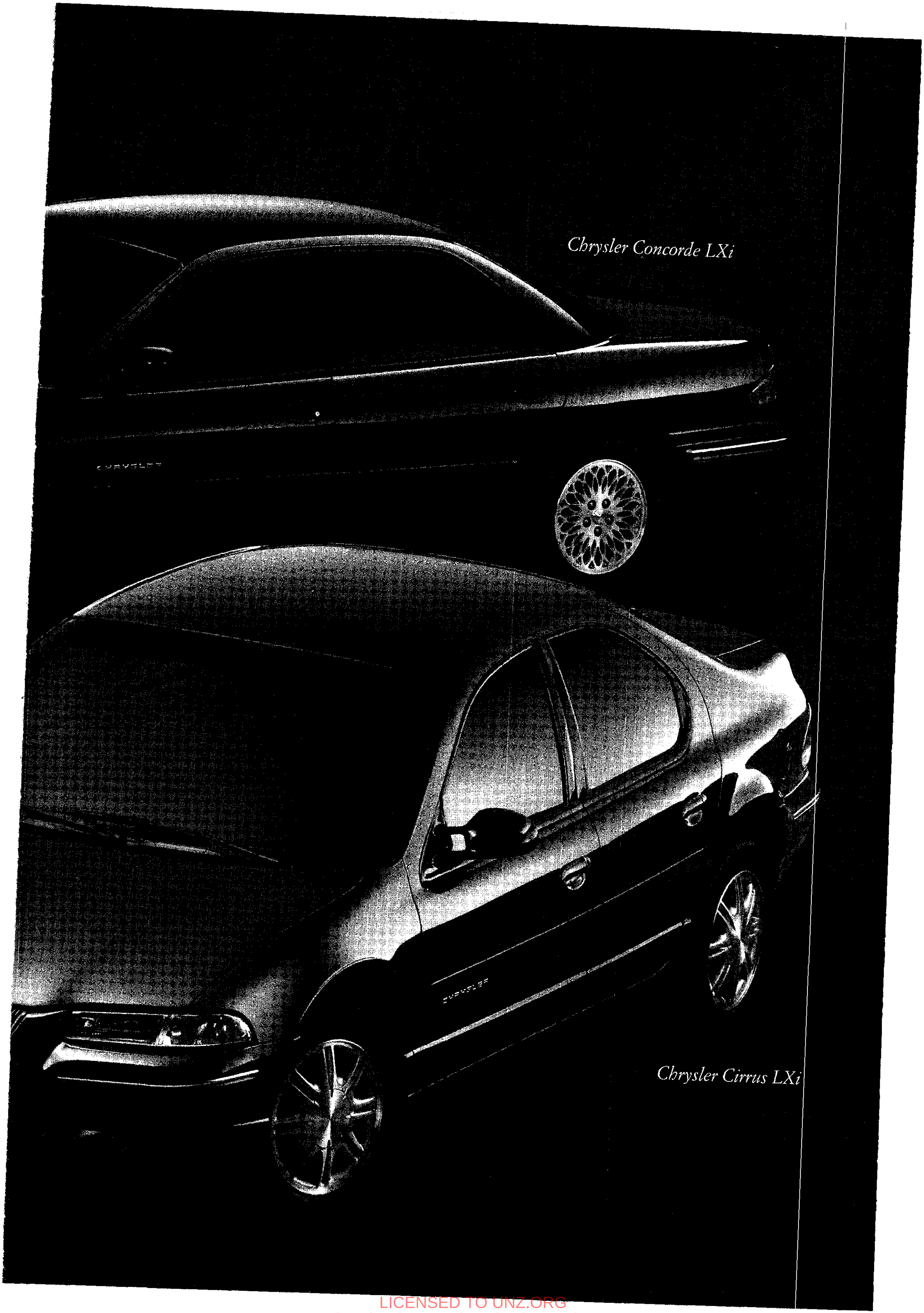


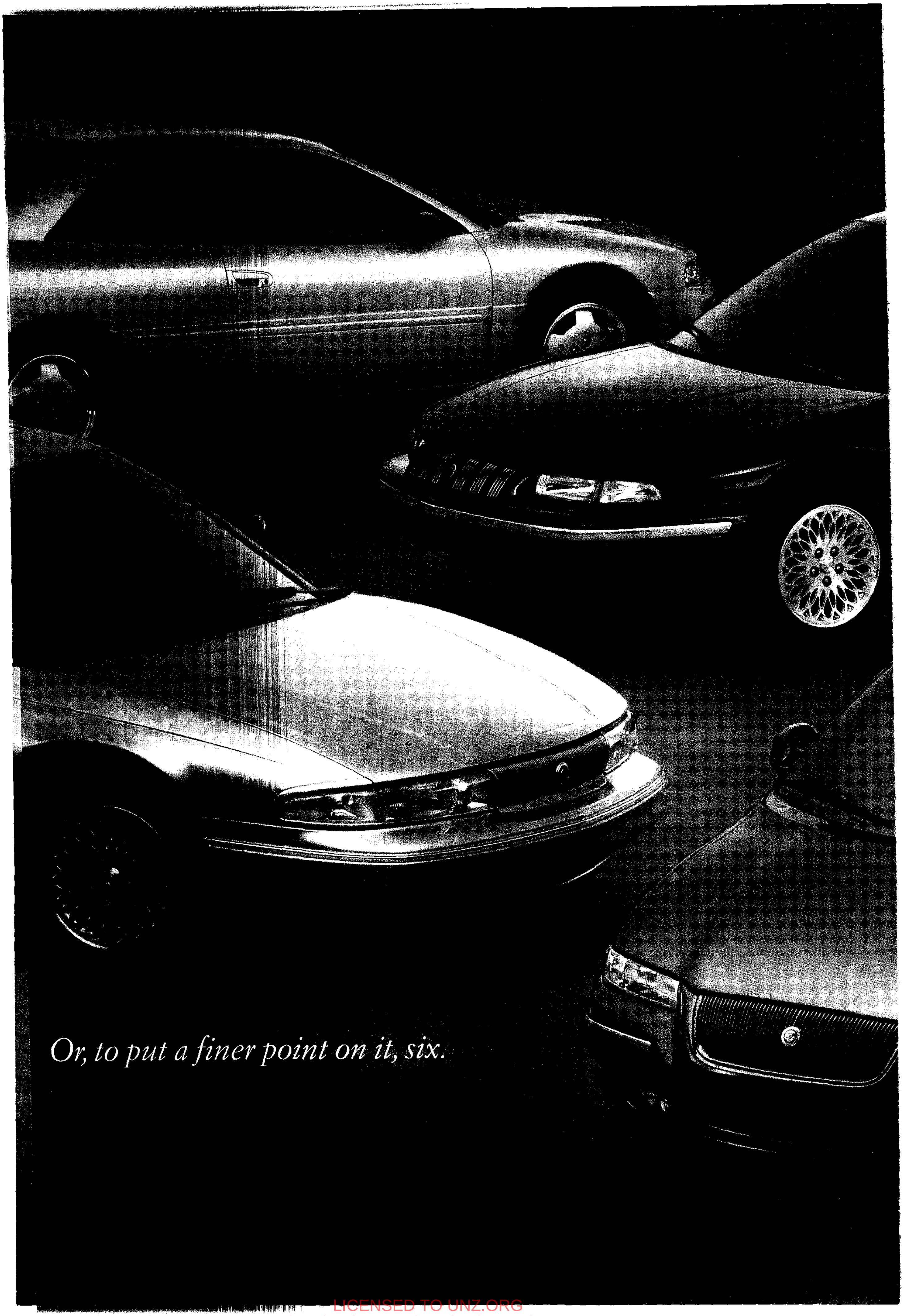
*It is, in the end, the simple idea that one plus one can,*

*and must, equal more than two.*

*Chrysler Sebring LXi* 24-VALVE V6, RACE-INSPIRED SUSPENSION, SPEED-SENSITIVE STEERING, 8-SPEAKER SOUND SYSTEM, 35" OF REAR LEGROOM.

*Chrysler Sebring JXi Convertible* 24-VALVE V6, CAB-FORWARD DESIGN, 4-WHEEL INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION, LEATHER-TRIMMED SEATS, 35" OF REAR LEGROOM.


Chrysler Concorde LXi
Chrysler Cirrus LXi


Or, to put a finer point on it, six.

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be "counterfeit, 'Supernotes,' " and he added that "the situation was so bad that German banks would no longer accept 100 dollar bills from Russian citizens."

The severity of the Supernote problem in Russia is even more remarkable in light of the volume of genuine hundred-dollar bills that are being sent there. In the last year, a handful of American banks—led by Republic National—have shipped more than twenty billion dollars in crisp, new hundred-dollar bills to about fifty Moscow banks, in return for other currencies or gold bullion. Viktor Melnikov does not think this is a good thing; he told the State Department representatives that at least half the banks in Russia were believed to be controlled by organized crime, and expressed concern that much of the money coming from the United States "was being used for illegal purposes, including narcotics trafficking." Republic National and the other banks may be profiting handsomely on their transaction fees, but they are breaking no laws in sending all that cash to Russia; indeed, they buy it directly from the Federal Reserve, and the stacks of hundreds arrive by plane in Moscow still in their government shrink-wrap. Allison, of the Fed, acknowledged that some "undesirable stuff" might be going on in Russia—it's a big country, he pointed out—but he spoke with obvious satisfaction of the Russian demand for dollars. "Issuing currency is about the best racket there is for a government," he said, smiling.

The closest that any Treasury employees interviewed for this account came to admitting the existence of the Supernote was an acknowledgment by two Secret Service officials—Paul Hackenberry, the assistant director of investigations, and Richard Rohde, the head of the counterfeit division—that a "family" of counterfeit hundreds was being printed in the Middle East. But they insisted that the term Supernote was a "misnomer" and was not employed by the Secret Service. "They are good-quality notes, but not that good," Rohde said. When he was asked to present some samples of the Middle Eastern counterfeit for inspection, he produced two notes—one a Series 1988 and the other a Series 1993. Although he took considerable pains to point out various imperfections, the 1993 note nevertheless looked flawless to an untrained eye. Moreover, the note contained an embedded polymer security thread, a feat that had taken Crane & Company years to accomplish.

But Hackenberry and Rohde were willing, even eager, to talk about the alarming rise of foreign counterfeiting of American currency, and the need for the Secret Service to enhance its overseas presence—an obvious source of frustration. Rohde said that of the counterfeit American money seized within the United States last year, seventy-two per cent was manufactured abroad, and that the volume of seizures outside the United States was increasing every year. In August, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with the help of the Secret Service, confiscated a hundred and twelve million dollars in fake hundreds in Saint-Constant, Quebec; in Bogotá, Colombia, counterfeiters copiously produce hundreds and twenties on the bleached paper of authentic dollar bills.

The establishment of a new office in Cyprus may at last help the Secret Service answer some key questions about the Supernote. (Until now, the task force in Cyprus has consisted mostly of agents on temporary loan from offices in Rome and the United States, with occasional assistance from the Paris office, the State Department, the C.I.A., Israeli intelligence, and the German federal police.) A person familiar with the efforts of the Supernote task force says that one of those key questions is whether the motive for the counterfeit extends beyond simple greed to the funding of Islamic terrorist groups, or an ideological attack on a symbol of the United States. An even darker, though highly speculative, scenario, advanced by, among other people, a senior staff member for a Senate subcommittee that investigates money laundering, is that the Supernote may be used to underwrite the development of a deployable nuclear device; in the former Soviet Union, weapons-grade plutonium is reputedly for sale. Robert Leuver is convinced that the Supernote is designed to cause economic harm. "This is an act of terrorism—monetary warfare," he says. "The Treasury won't admit it."

Since 1979, Syria has appeared on the State Department's list of terrorist nations—a small club of countries that includes Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Sudan. While no Syrian officials are known to have been directly involved in planning or executing terrorist attacks since 1986, Syria permits Iran to supply arms to Hezbollah, the Islamic terrorist group, through Damascus, and allows other groups, including Hamas and the P.K.K., to train or take refuge in the Bekaa Valley. Nevertheless, Syria has tried to initiate discussions with the State Department to have its name removed from the list; Damascus is publicly committed to the Middle East peace process, and during the past three years President Clinton has met twice with President Assad. Before one of those meetings, Clinton was briefed by then Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, who, in turn, had been briefed on the Supernote by two Secret Service agents from the Cyprus task force. A State Department official says that stopping production of the Supernote would likely be a condition of Syria's removal from the terrorist list.

There is little reason to believe that a diplomatic solution will work. Syria, some people have observed, is as much a racketeering enterprise as it is a nation, and for years it has allegedly been involved in the international drug trade—a business often complemented by counterfeiting. According to a 1992 congressional report, large quantities of heroin—at the time of the report, nearly twenty per cent of United States consumption—along with hashish and cocaine, are produced in the Bekaa Valley. The report named several high-ranking members of the Syrian government and military as conspirators in the drug trafficking, including President Assad's brother Rifaat. The motive behind the Supernote remains the subject of greatest speculation, and may determine whether military force is used to destroy the printing facility, if it is ever located. It will also determine whether the Treasury has blundered in failing to treat the Middle Eastern counterfeit as an urgent law-enforcement issue, let alone one of national security. ♦

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### BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

[*From the Los Angeles Times*]

"What can be garnered from this order is that the court tentatively has decided at least one section of the proposition is unconstitutional," said Stephen Yagman, who has filed one of five anti-Proposition 187 lawsuits before Pfaelzer. "If it turns out that finding one unconstitutional means the others can't be enforced, the court doesn't need to look at any particular sections, because they fall like dominoes rather than each being a duck having to be hit with a round of buckshot."

## ANNALS OF RACE

# THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACK MAN

*A different kind of jury—one made up of black cultural leaders—weighs in on the Simpson verdict and the Million Man March.*

### BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

"EVERY day, in every way, we are getting meta and meta," the philosopher John Wisdom used to say, venturing a cultural counterpart to Émile Coué's famous mantra of self-improvement. So it makes sense that in the aftermath of the Simpson trial the focus of attention has been swiftly displaced from the verdict to the reaction to the verdict, and then to the reaction to the reaction to the verdict, and, finally, to the reaction to the reaction to the reaction to the verdict—which is to say, black indignation at white anger at black jubilation at Simpson's acquittal. It's a spiral made possible by the relay circuit of race. Only in America.

An American historian I know registers a widespread sense of bathos when he says, "Who would have imagined that the Simpson trial would be like the Kennedy assassination—that you'd remember where you were when the verdict was announced?" But everyone does, of course. The eminent sociologist William Julius Wilson was in the red-carpet lounge of a United Airlines terminal, the only black in a crowd of white travellers, and found himself as stunned and disturbed as they were. Wynton Marsalis, on tour with his band in California, recalls that "everybody was acting like they were above watching it, but then when it got to be ten o'clock—zoom, we said, 'Put the verdict on!' " Spike Lee was with Jackie Robinson's widow, Rachel, rummaging through a trunk filled with her husband's belongings, in preparation for a bio-pic he's making on the athlete. Jamaica Kincaid was sitting in her car in the parking lot of her local grocery store in Vermont, listening to the proceedings on National Public Radio, and she didn't pull out until after they were over. I was teaching a literature seminar at Harvard from twelve to two, and watched the verdict with the class on a television set in the seminar room. That's where I first saw the sort of racialized response that itself would fill television screens for the next few days: the white students looked aghast, and the black students cheered. "Maybe you should remind the students that this is a case about two people who were brutally slain, and not an occasion to celebrate," my teaching assistant, a white woman, whispered to me.

The two weeks spanning the O. J. Simpson verdict and Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March on Washington were a good time for connoisseurs of racial paranoia. As blacks exulted at Simpson's acquittal, horrified whites had a fleeting sense that this race thing was knottier than they'd ever supposed—that, when all the pieties were cleared away, blacks really *were* strangers in their midst. (The unspoken sentiment: *And I thought I knew these people.*) There was the faintest tincture of the Southern slave-owner's disquiet in the aftermath of the bloody slave revolt led by Nat Turner—when the gentleman farmer was left to wonder which of his smiling, servile retainers would have slit *his* throat if the rebellion had spread as was intended, like fire on parched thatch. In the day or so following the verdict, young urban professionals took note of a slight *froideur* between themselves and their nannies and babysitters—the awkwardness of an unbroached subject. Rita Dove, who recently completed a term as the United States Poet Laureate, and who believes that Simpson was guilty, found it "appalling that white people were so outraged—more appalling than the decision as to whether he was guilty or not." Of course, it's possible to overstate the tensions. Marsalis invokes the example of team sports, saying, "You want your side to win, whatever the side is going to be. And the thing is, we're still at a point in our national history where we look at each other as sides."

The matter of side-taking cuts deep. An old cartoon depicts a woman who has taken her errant daughter to see a child psychiatrist. "And when we were watching 'The Wizard of Oz,' " the distraught mother is explaining, "she was rooting for the wicked witch!" What many whites experienced was the bewildering sense that an entire population had been rooting for the wrong side. "This case is a classic example of what I call interstitial spaces," says Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, who recently retired from the federal Court of Appeals, and who last month received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. "The jury system is predicated on the idea that different people can view the same evidence and reach diametrically opposed conclusions." But the observation brings little solace. If we disagree about something so basic, how can we find agreement about far thornier matters? For white observers, what's even scarier than the idea that black Americans were plumping for the villain, which is a misprision of value, is the idea that black Americans didn't recognize him *as* the villain, which is a misprision of fact. How can conversation begin when we disagree about reality? To put it at its harshest, for many whites a sincere belief in Simpson's innocence looks less like the culture of protest than like the culture of psychosis.

PERHAPS you didn't know that Liz Claiborne appeared on "Oprah" not long ago and said that she didn't design her clothes for black women—that their hips were too wide. Perhaps you didn't know that the soft drink Tropical Fantasy is manufactured by the Ku Klux Klan and contains a special ingredient designed to sterilize black men. (A warning flyer distributed in Harlem a few years ago claimed that these findings were vouchsafed on the television program "20/20.") Perhaps you didn't know that the Ku Klux Klan has a similar arrangement with Church's Fried Chicken—or is it Popeye's?

Perhaps you didn't know these things, but a good many black Americans think they do, and will discuss them with the same intentness they bring to speculations about the "shadowy figure" in a Brentwood driveway. Never mind that Liz Claiborne has never appeared on "Oprah," that the beleaguered Brooklyn company that makes Tropical Fantasy has gone as far as to make available an F.D.A. assay of its ingredients, and that those fried-chicken franchises pose a threat mainly to black folks' arteries. The folklorist Patricia A. Turner, who has collected dozens of such tales in an invaluable 1993 study of rumor in African-American culture, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," points out the patterns to be found here: that these stories encode regnant anxieties, that they take root under particular conditions and play particular social roles, that the currency of rumor flourishes where "official" news has proved untrustworthy.

*Different readings, top row: Spike Lee, John Edgar Wideman, Anna Deavere Smith, Cornel West, Thelma Golden, Bell Hooks, Walter Mosley, Rita Dove. Middle Row: Maya Angelou, Glenn Loury, William Julius Wilson, Erroll McDonald, Angela Davis, Jessye Norman, Kathleen Cleaver. Bottom row: Amiri Baraka, Anita Hill, Wynton Marsalis, Patricia Williams, Jamaica Kincaid, Sidney Poitier, A. Leon Higginbotham, Ishmael Reed.*

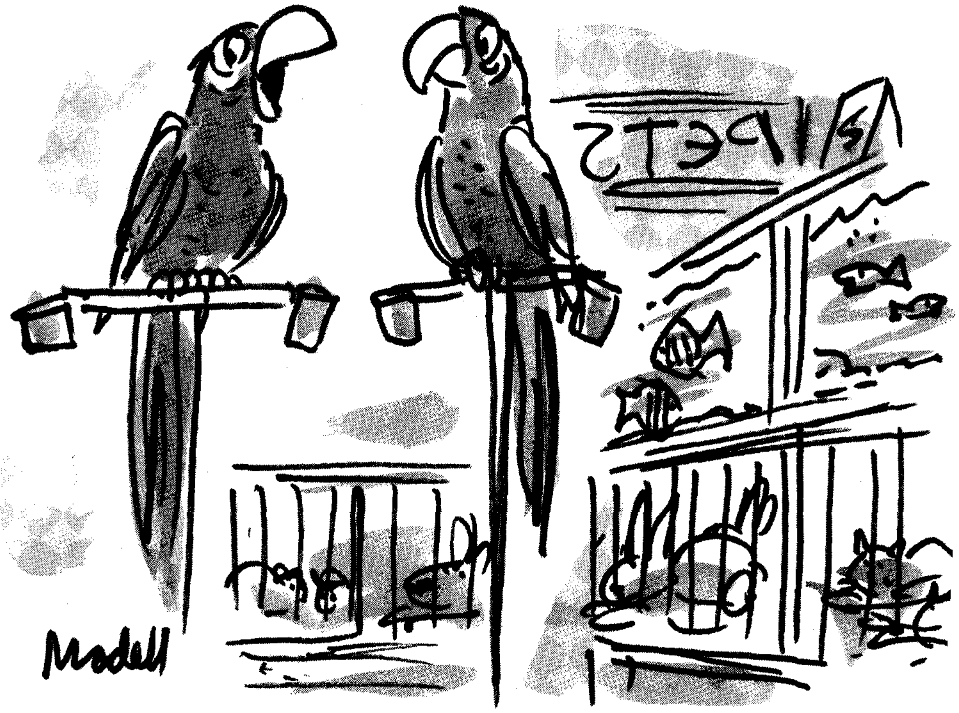
STEVEN DANA; PHOTOS: SYGMA, UNIV. OF MASS., SHERRIE NICKOL/WHITNEY PUBLICITY, BLACK IMAGES, RETNA, JILL KREMENTZ, ASSOCIATED PRESS, MICHAEL SIMON/ATHENEUM, COLUMBIA UNIV., OUTLINE, CHICAGO UNIV. PRESS, CORKY GALLO, JEFF WEINER.

Certainly the Fuhrman tapes might have been scripted to confirm the old saw that paranoids, too, have enemies. If you wonder why blacks seem particularly susceptible to rumors and conspiracy theories, you might look at a history in which the official story was a poor guide to anything that mattered much, and in which rumor sometimes verged on the truth. Heard the one about the L.A. cop who hated interracial couples, fantasized about making a bonfire of black bodies, and boasted of planting evidence? How about the one about the federal government's forty-year study of how untreated syphilis affects black men? For that matter, have you ever read through some of the F.B.I.'s COINTELPRO files? ("There is but one way out for you," an F.B.I. scribe wrote to Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964, thoughtfully urging on him the advantages of suicide. "You better take it before your filthy, abnormal, fraudulent self is bared to the nation.")

People arrive at an understanding of themselves and the world through narratives—narratives purveyed by schoolteachers, newscasters, "authorities," and all the other authors of our common sense. Counternarratives are, in turn, the means by which groups contest that dominant reality and the fretwork of assumptions that supports it. Sometimes delusion lies that way; sometimes not. There's a sense in which much of black history is simply counternarrative that has been documented and legitimatized, by slow, hard-won scholarship. The "shadowy figures" of American history have long been our own ancestors, both free and enslaved. In any case, fealty to counternarratives is an index to alienation, not to skin color: witness Representative Helen Chenoweth, of Idaho, and her devoted constituents. With all the appositeness of allegory, the copies of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" sold by black venders in New York—who are supplied with them by Lushena Books, a black-nationalist book wholesaler—were published by the white supremacist Angriff Press, in Hollywood. Paranoia knows no color or coast.

FINALLY, though, it's misleading to view counternarrative as another pathology of disenfranchisement. If the M.I.A. myth, say, is rooted among a largely working-class constituency, there are many myths—one of them known as Reaganism—that hold considerable appeal among the privileged classes. "So many white brothers and sisters are living in a state of denial in terms of how deep white supremacy is seated in their culture and society," the scholar and social critic Cornel West says. "Now we recognize that in a fundamental sense we really do live in different worlds." In that respect, the reaction to the Simpson verdict has been something of an education. The novelist Ishmael Reed talks of "wealthy white male commentators who live in a world where the police don't lie, don't plant evidence—and drug dealers give you unlimited credit." He adds, "Nicole, you know, also dated Mafia hit men."

"I think he's innocent, I really do," West says. "I do think it was linked to some drug subculture of violence. It looks as if both O.J. and Nicole had some connection to drug activity. And the killings themselves were classic examples of that drug culture of violence. It could have to do with money owed—it could have to do with a number of



*"We've got to talk."*

things. And I think that O.J. was quite aware of and fearful of this." On this theory, Simpson may have appeared at the crime scene as a witness. "I think that he had a sense that it was coming down, both on him and on her, and Brother Ron Goldman just happened to be there," West conjectures. "But there's a possibility also that O.J. could have been there, gone over and tried to see what was going on, saw that he couldn't help, split, and just ran away. He might have said, 'I can't stop this thing, and they are coming at me to do the same thing.' He may have actually run for his life."

To believe that Simpson is innocent is to believe that a terrible injustice has been averted, and this is precisely what many black Americans, including many prominent ones, do believe. Thus the soprano Jessye Norman is angry over what she sees as the decision of the media to prejudge Simpson rather than "educate the public as to how we could possibly look at things a bit differently." She says she wishes that the real culprit "would stand up and say, 'I did this and I am sorry I caused so much trouble.' " And while she is sensitive to the issue of spousal abuse, she is skeptical about the way it was enlisted by the prosecution: "You have to stop getting into how they were at home, because there are not a lot of relationships that could be put on television that we would think, O.K., that's a good one. I mean, just stop pretending that this is the case." Then, too, she asks, "Isn't it interesting to you that this Faye Resnick person was staying with Nicole Brown Simpson and that she happened to have left on the eighth of June? Does that tell you that maybe there's some awful coincidence here?" The widespread theory about murderous drug dealers Norman finds "perfectly plausible, knowing what drugs do," and she adds, "People are punished for being bad."

There's a sense in which all such accounts can be considered counternarratives, or fragments of them—subaltern knowledge, if you like. They dispute the tenets of official culture; they do not receive the imprimatur of editorialists or of network broadcasters; they are not seriously entertained on "MacNeil/Lehrer." And when they do surface they are given consideration primarily for their ethnographic value. An official culture treats their claims as it does those of millenarian cultists in Texas, or Marxist deconstructionists in the academy: as things to be diagnosed, deciphered, given meaning—that is, *another* meaning. Black folk say they believe Simpson is innocent, and then the white gatekeepers of a media culture cajolingly explain what black folk really mean when they say it, offering the explanation from the highest of motives: because the alternative is a population that, by their lights, is not merely counternormative but crazy. Black folk may mean anything at all; just not what they say they mean.

YET you need nothing so grand as an epistemic rupture to explain why different people weigh the evidence of authority differently. In the words of the cunning Republican campaign slogan, "Who do you trust?" It's a commonplace that white folks trust the police and black folks don't. Whites recognize this in the abstract, but they're continually surprised at the *depth* of black wariness. They shouldn't be. Norman Podhoretz's soul-searching 1963 essay, "My Negro Problem, and Ours"—one of the frankest accounts we have of liberalism and race resentment—tells of a Brooklyn boyhood spent under the shadow of carefree, cruel Negro assailants, and of the author's residual unease when he passes groups of blacks in his Upper West Side neighborhood. And yet, he notes in a crucial passage, "I know now, as I did not know when I was a child, that power is on my side, that the police are working for me and not for them." That ordinary, unremarkable comfort—the feeling that "the police are working for me"—continues to elude blacks, even many successful blacks. Thelma Golden, the curator of the Whitney's "Black Male" show, points out that on the very day the verdict was announced a black man in Harlem was killed by the police under disputed circumstances. As older blacks like to repeat, "When white folks say 'justice,' they mean 'just us.' "

Blacks—in particular, black men—swap their experiences of police encounters like war stories, and there are few who don't have more than one story to tell. "These stories have a ring of cliché about them," Erroll McDonald, Pantheon's executive editor and one of the few prominent blacks in publishing, says, "but, as we all know about clichés, they're almost always true." McDonald tells of renting a Jaguar in New Orleans and being stopped by the police—simply "to show cause why I shouldn't be deemed a problematic Negro in a possibly stolen car." Wynton Marsalis says, "Shit, the police slapped me upside the head when I was in high school. I wasn't Wynton Marsalis then. I was just another nigger standing out somewhere on the street whose head could be slapped and did get slapped." The crime novelist Walter Mosley recalls, "When I was a kid in Los Angeles, they used to stop me all the time, beat on me, follow me around, tell me that I was stealing things." Nor does William Julius Wilson—who has a son-in-law on the Chicago police force ("You couldn't find a nicer, more dedicated guy")—wonder why he was stopped near a small New England town by a policeman who wanted to know what he was doing in those parts. There's a moving violation that many African-Americans know as D.W.B.: Driving While Black.

So we all have our stories. In 1968, when I was eighteen, a man who knew me was elected mayor of my West Virginia county, in an upset victory. A few weeks into his term, he passed on something he thought I should know: the county police had made a list of people to be arrested in the event of a serious civil disturbance, and my name was on it. Years of conditioning will tell. Wynton Marsalis says, "My worst fear is to have to go before the criminal-justice system." Absurdly enough, it's mine, too.

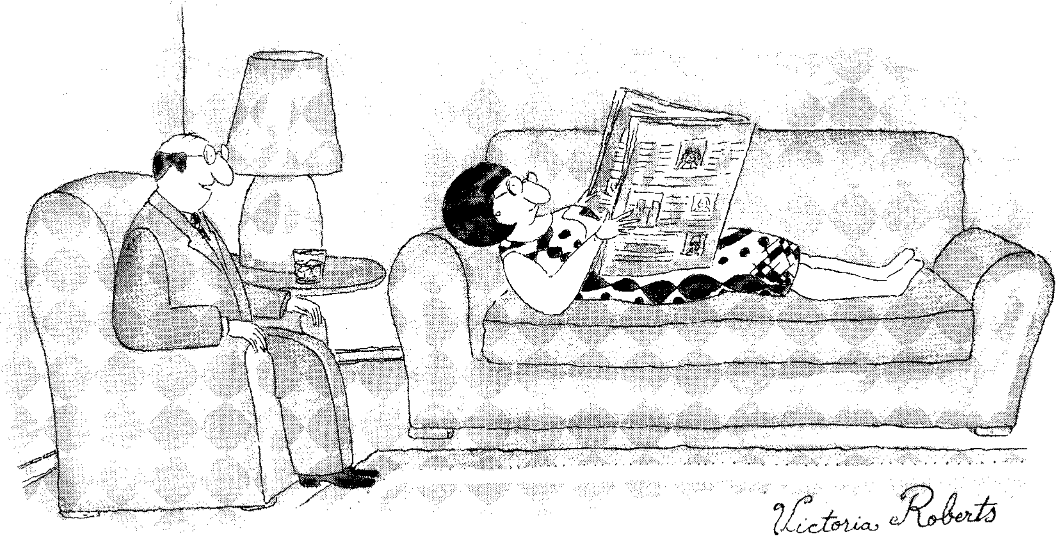
ANOTHER barrier to interracial comprehension is talk of the "race card"—a phrase that itself infuriates many blacks. Judge Higginbotham, who pronounces himself "not uncomfortable at all" with the verdict, is uncomfortable indeed with charges that Johnnie Cochran played the race card. "This whole point is one hundred per cent inaccurate," Higginbotham says. "If you knew that the most important witness had a history of racism and hostility against black people, that should have been a relevant factor of inquiry even if the jury had been all white. If the defendant had been Jewish and the police officer had a long history of expressed anti-Semitism and having planted evidence against innocent persons who were Jewish, I can't believe that anyone would have been saying that defense counsel was playing the anti-Semitism card." Angela Davis finds the very metaphor to be a problem. "Race is not a card," she says firmly. "The whole case was pervaded with issues of race."

Those who share her view were especially outraged at Robert Shapiro's famous post-trial rebuke to Cochran—for not only playing the race card but dealing it "from the bottom of the deck." Ishmael Reed, who is writing a book about the case, regards Shapiro's remarks as sheer opportunism: "He wants to keep his Beverly Hills clients—a perfectly commercial reason." In Judge Higginbotham's view, "Johnnie Cochran established that he was as effective as any lawyer in America, and though whites can tolerate black excellence in singing, dancing, and dunking, there's always been a certain level of discomfort among many whites when you have a one-on-one challenge in terms of intellectual competition. If Edward Bennett Williams, who was one of the most able lawyers in the country, had raised the same issues, half of the complaints would not exist."

By the same token, the display of black prowess in the courtroom was heartening for many black viewers. Cornel West says, "I think part of the problem is that Shapiro—and this is true of certain white brothers—has a profound fear of black-male charisma. And this is true not only in the law but across the professional world. You see, you have so many talented white brothers who deserve to be in the limelight. But one of the reasons they are not in the limelight is that they are not charismatic. And here comes a black person who's highly talented but also charismatic and therefore able to command center stage. So you get a very real visceral kind of jealousy that has to do with sexual competition as well as professional competition."

Erroll McDonald touches upon another aspect of sexual tension when he says, "The so-called race card has always been the joker. And the joker is the history of sexual racial politics in this country. People forget the singularity of this issue—people forget that less than a century ago black men were routinely lynched for merely glancing at white women or for having been *thought* to have glanced at a white woman." He adds, with mordant irony, "Now we've come to a point in our history where a black man could, potentially, have murdered a white woman and thrown in a white man to boot—and got off. So the country has become far more complex in its discussion of race." This is, as he appreciates, a less than perfectly consoling thought.

"BUT he's coming for me," a woman muses in Toni Morrison's 1994 novel, "Jazz," shortly before she is murdered by a jealous ex-lover. "Maybe tomorrow he'll find me. Maybe tonight."



*"Stop having good ideas for other people."*

Morrison, it happens, is less interested in the grand passions of love and requital than she is in the curious texture of communal amnesty. In the event, the woman's death goes unavenged; the man who killed her is forgiven even by her friends and relatives. Neighbors feel that the man fell victim to her wiles, that he didn't understand "how she liked to push people, men." Or, as one of them says of her, "live the life; pay the price." Even the woman—who refuses to name the culprit as she bleeds to death—seems to accede to the view that she brought it on herself.

It's an odd and disturbing theme, and one with something of a history in black popular culture. An R. & B. hit from 1960, "There's Something on Your Mind," relates the anguish of a man who is driven to kill by his lover's infidelity. The chorus alternates with spoken narrative, which informs us that his first victim is the friend with whom she was unfaithful. But then:

> Just as you make it up in your mind to forgive her, here come another one of your best friends through the door. This really makes you blow your top, and you go right ahead and shoot her. And realizing what you've done, you say: "Baby, please, speak to me. Forgive me. I'm sorry."

"We are a *forgiving* people," Anita Hill tells me, and she laughs, a little uneasily. We're talking about the support for O. J. Simpson in the black community; at least, I think we are.

A black woman told the *Times* last week, "He has been punished enough." But forgiveness is not all. There is also an element in this of outlaw culture: the tendency—which unites our lumpenproles with our postmodern ironists—to celebrate transgression for its own sake. Spike Lee, who was surprised but "wasn't happy" at the verdict ("I would have bet money that he was going to the slammer"), reached a similar conclusion: "A lot of black folks said, 'Man, O.J. is *bad*, you know. This is the first brother in the history of the world who got away with the murder of white folks, and a blond, blue-eyed woman at that.' "

But then there is the folk wisdom on the question of why Nicole Brown Simpson had to die—the theodicy of the streets. For nothing could be further from the outlaw ethic than the simple and widely shared certainty that, as Jessye Norman says, people are punished for doing wrong. And compounding the sentiment is Morrison's subject—the culturally vexed status of the so-called crime of passion, or what some took to be one, anyway. You play, you pay: it's an attitude that exists on the streets, but not only on the streets, and one that somehow attaches to Nicole, rather than to her ex-husband. Many counter-narratives revolve around her putative misbehavior. The black feminist Bell Hooks notes with dismay that what many people took to be a "narrative of a crime of passion" had as its victim "a woman that many people, white and black, felt was like a whore. Precisely by being a sexually promiscuous woman, by being a woman who used drugs, by being a white woman with a black man, she had already fallen from grace in many people's eyes—there was no way to redeem her." Ishmael Reed, for one, has no interest in redeeming her. "To paint O. J. Simpson as a beast, they had to depict her as a saint," he complains. "Apparently, she had a violent temper. She slapped her Jamaican maid. I'm wondering, the feminists who are giving Simpson such a hard time—do they approve of white women slapping maids?"

Of course, the popular trial of Nicole Brown Simpson—one conducted off camera, in whispers—has further occluded anything recognizable as sexual politics. When Anita Hill heard that O. J. Simpson was going to be part of the Million Man March on Washington, she felt it was entirely in keeping with the occasion: a trial in which she believed that matters of gender had been "bracketed" was going to be succeeded by a march from which women were excluded. And, while Minister Louis Farrakhan had told black men that October 16th was to serve as a "day of atonement" for their sins, the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman was obviously not among the sins he had in mind. Bell Hooks argues, "Both O.J.'s case and the Million Man March confirm that, while white men are trying to be sensitive and pretending they're the new man, black men are saying that patriarchy must be upheld at all costs, even if women must die." She sees the march as a congenial arena for Simpson in symbolic terms: "I think he'd like to strut his stuff, as the patriarch. He is the dick that stayed hard longer." ("The surprising thing is that you won't see Clarence Thomas going on that march," Anita Hill remarks of another icon of patriarchy.) Farrakhan himself prefers metaphors of military mobilization, but the exclusionary politics of the event has clearly distracted from its ostensible message of solidarity. "First of all, I wouldn't go to no war and leave half the army home," says Amiri Baraka, the radical poet and playwright who achieved international renown in the sixties as the leading spokesman for the Black Arts movement. "Logistically, that doesn't make sense." He notes that Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington was "much more inclusive," and sees Farrakhan's regression as "an absolute duplication of what's happening in the country," from Robert Bly on: the sacralization of masculinity.

Something like that dynamic is what many white feminists saw on display in the Simpson verdict; but it's among women that the racial divide is especially salient. The black legal scholar and activist Patricia Williams says she was "stunned by the intensely personal resentment of some of my white women friends in particular." Stunned but, on reflection, not mystified. "This is Greek drama," she declares. "Two of the most hotly contended aspects of our lives are violence among human beings who happen to be police officers and violence among human beings who happen to be husbands, spouses, lovers." Meanwhile, our attention has been fixated on the rhetorical violence between human beings who happen to disagree about the outcome of the O. J. Simpson trial.

It's a cliché to speak of the Simpson trial as a soap opera—as entertainment, as theatre—but it's also true, and in ways that are worth exploring further. For one thing, the trial provides a fitting rejoinder to those who claim that we live in an utterly fragmented culture, bereft of the common narratives that bind a people together. True, Parson Weems has given way to Dan Rather, but public narrative persists. Nor has it escaped notice that the biggest televised legal con-

# BLEND SCHOOLS

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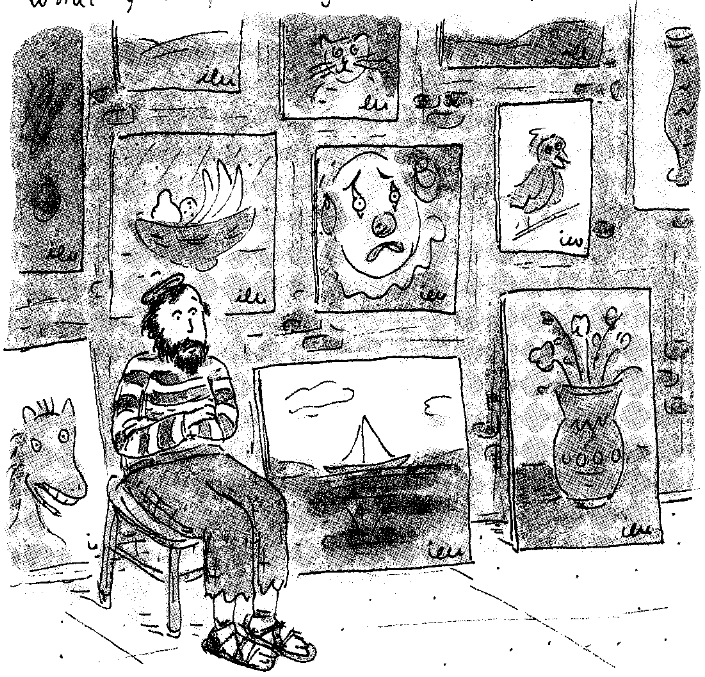

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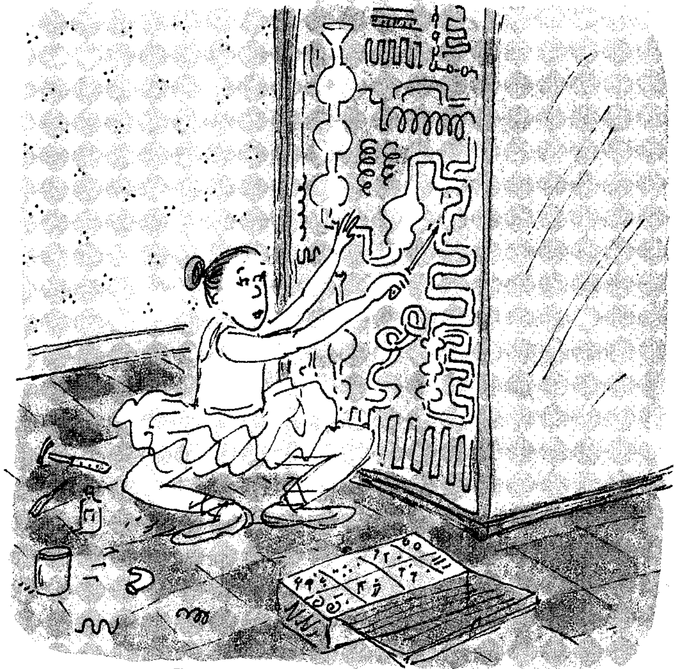

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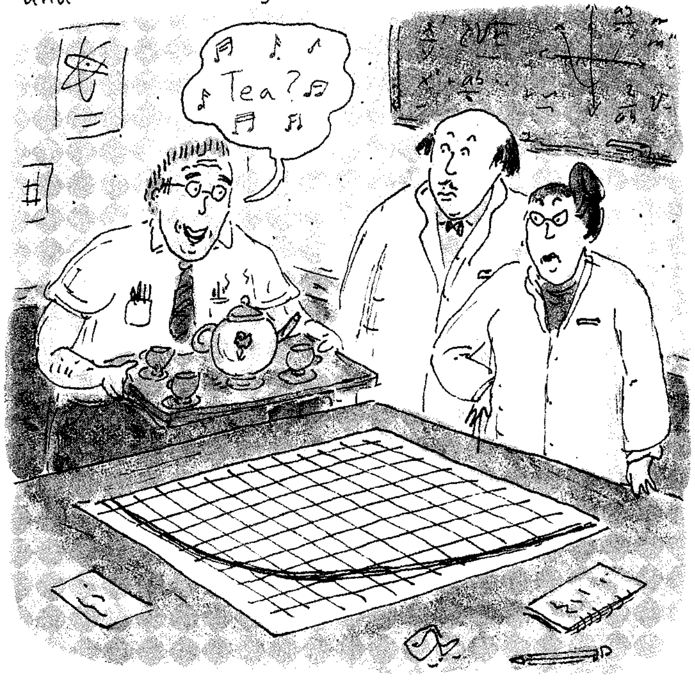

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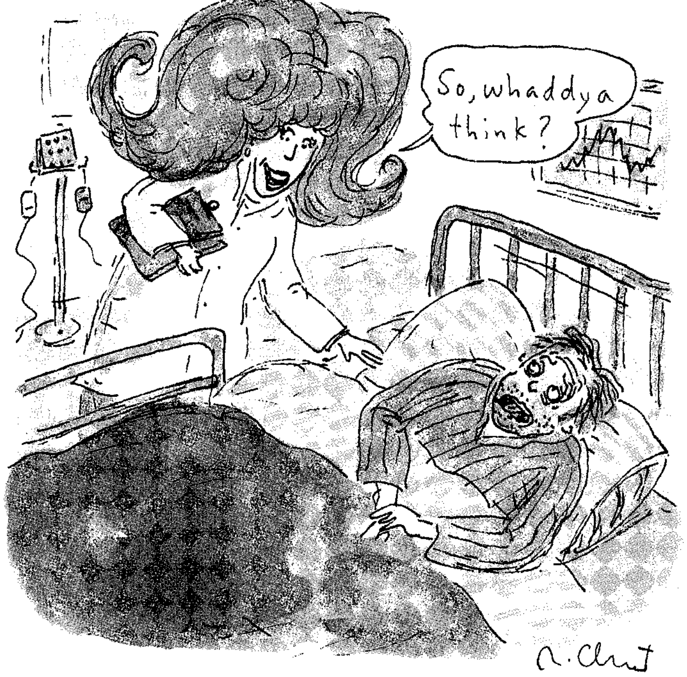

So, whaddya think?

R. Chast

tests of the last half decade have involved race matters: Anita Hill and Rodney King. So there you have it: the Simpson trial—black entertainment television at its finest. Ralph Ellison's hopeful insistence on the Negro's centrality to American culture finds, at last, a certain tawdry confirmation.

"The media generated in people a feeling of being spectators at a show," the novelist John Edgar Wideman says. "And at the end of a show you applaud. You are happy for the good guy. There is that sense of primal identification and closure." Yet it's a fallacy of "cultural literacy" to equate shared narratives with shared meanings. The fact that American TV shows are rebroadcast across the globe causes many people to wring their hands over the menace of cultural imperialism; seldom do they bother to inquire about the meanings that different people bring to and draw from these shows. When they do make inquiries, the results are often surprising. One researcher talked to Israeli Arabs who had just watched an episode of "Dallas"—an episode in which Sue Ellen takes her baby, leaves her husband, J.R., and moves in with her ex-lover and his father. The Arab viewers placed their own construction on the episode: they were all convinced that Sue Ellen had moved in with her *own* father—something that by their mores at least made sense.

A similar thing happened in America this year: the communal experience afforded by a public narrative (and what narrative more public?) was splintered by the politics of interpretation. As far as the writer Maya Angelou is concerned, the Simpson trial was an exercise in minstrelsy. "Minstrel shows caricatured every aspect of the black man's life, beginning with his sexuality," she says. "They portrayed the black man as devoid of all sensibilities and sensitivities. They minimized and diminished the possibility of familial love. And that is what the trial is about. Not just the prosecution but everybody seemed to want to show him as other than a normal human being. Nobody let us just see a man." But there is, of course, little consensus about what genre would best accommodate the material. Walter Mosley says, "The story plays to large themes, so I'm sure somebody will write about it. But I don't think it's a mystery. I think it's much more like a novel by Zola." What a writer might make of the material is one thing; what the audience has made of it is another.

## THE SHARPING STONE

In an apothecary's chest of drawers,
Sweet cedar that we'd purchased secondhand,
In one of its weighty deep-sliding recesses
I found the sharping stone that was to be
Our gift to him. Still in its wrapping paper.
Like a baton of black light I'd failed to pass.

*

Airless cinder-depths. But all the same,
The way it lay there, it wakened something, too . . .
I thought of us that evening on the logs,
Flat on our backs, the pair of us, parallel,
Supported head to heel, arms straight, eyes front,
Listening to the rain drip off the trees
And saying nothing, braced to the damp bark.
What possessed us? The bare, lopped loveliness
Of those two winter trunks, the way they seemed
Prepared for launching, at right angles across
A causeway of short fence posts set like rollers.
Neither of us spoke. The puddles waited.
The workers had gone home, saws fallen silent.
And next thing, down we lay, babes in the wood,
Gazing up at the flood-face of the sky
Until it seemed a flood was carrying us
Out of the forest park, feet first, eyes front,
Out of November, out of middle age,
Together, out across the Sea of Moyle.

*

*Sarcophage des époux.* In terra cotta.
Etruscan couple shown side by side,
Recumbent on left elbows, husband pointing
With his right arm and watching where he points,
Wife in front, her earrings in, her braids
Down to her waist, taking her sexual ease.
He is all eyes, she is all brow and dream,

"Simpson is a B-movie star and people were watching this like a B movie," Patricia Williams says. "And this is *not* the American B-movie ending." Or was it? "From my perspective as an attorney, this trial was much more like a movie than a trial," Kathleen Cleaver, who was once the Black Panthers' Minister for Communication and is now a professor of law at Emory, says. "It had the budget of a movie, it had the casting of a movie, it had the tension of a movie, and the happy ending of a movie." Spike Lee, speaking professionally, is dubious about the trial's cinematic possibilities: "I don't care who makes this movie, it is never going to equal what people have seen in their living rooms and houses for eight or nine months." Or is it grand opera? Jessye Norman considers: "Well, it certainly has all the ingredients. I mean, somebody meets somebody and somebody gets angry with somebody and somebody dies." She laughs. "It sounds like the 'Ring' cycle of Wagner—it really does."

"This story has been told any number of times," Angelou says. "The first thing I thought about was Eugene O'Neill's

Her right forearm and hand held out as if
Some bird she sees in her deep inward gaze
Might be about to roost there. Domestic
Love, the artist thought, warm tones and property,
The frangibility of terra cotta . . .
Which is how they figured on the color postcard
(*Louvre, Département des Antiquités*),
We sent him once and found among his things.

*

He loved inspired mistakes: his Spanish grandson's
English transliteration, thanking him
For a boat trip. "That was a marvellous
Walk on the water, Granddad." And indeed
He walked on air himself, never more so
Than when he had been widowed and the youth
In him, the athlete who had wooed her—
Breasting tapes and clearing the high bars—
Grew lightsome once again. Going at eighty
On the bendiest roads, going for broke
At every point-to-point and poker school,
"He commenced his wild career" a second time
And not a bother on him. Smoked like a train
And took the power mower in his stride.
Flirted and vaunted. Set fire to his bed.
Fell from a ladder. Learned to microwave.

*

So set the drawer on freshets of thaw water
And place the unused sharping stone inside it:
To be found next summer on a riverbank
Where scythes once hung all night in alder trees
And mowers played dawn scherzos on the blades,
Their arms like harpists' arms, one drawing towards,
One sweeping the bright rim of the extreme.

—SEAMUS HEANEY

'All God's Chillun.' " Then she considers how the event might be retrieved by an African-American literary tradition. "I think a great writer would have to approach it," she tells me pensively. "James Baldwin could have done it. And Toni Morrison could do it."

"Maya Angelou could do it," I say.

"I don't like that kind of stuff," she replies.

THERE are some for whom the question of adaptation is not entirely abstract. The performance artist and playwright Anna Deavere Smith has already worked on the 911 tape and F. Lee Bailey's cross-examination of Mark Fuhrman in the drama classes she teaches at Stanford. Now, with a dramaturge's eye, she identifies what she takes to be the climactic moment: "Just after the verdict was read I will always remember two sounds and one image. I heard Johnnie Cochran go '*Ugh*,' and then I heard the weeping of Kim Goldman. And then I saw the image of O. J.'s son, with one hand going upward on one eye and one hand pointed down, shaking and sobbing. I couldn't do the words right now; if I could find a collaborator, I would do something else. I feel that a choreographer ought to do that thing. Part of the tragedy was the fact of that '*Ugh*' and that crying. Because that '*Ugh*' wasn't even a full sound of victory, really." In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" Wallace Stevens famously said he didn't know whether he preferred "The beauty of inflections / Or the beauty of innuendoes, / The blackbird whistling / Or just after." American culture has spoken as with one voice: we like it just after.

Just after is when our choices and allegiances are made starkly apparent. Just after is when interpretation can be detached from the thing interpreted. Anita Hill, who saw her own presence at the Clarence Thomas hearings endlessly analyzed and allegorized, finds plenty of significance in the trial's reception, but says the trial itself had none. Naturally, the notion that the trial was sui generis is alien to most commentators. Yet it did not arrive in the world already costumed as a racial drama; it had to be racialized. And those critics—angry whites, indignant blacks—who like to couple this verdict with the Rodney King verdict should consider an elementary circumstance: Rodney King was an unknown and undistinguished black man who was brutalized by the police; the only thing exceptional about that episode was the presence of a video camera. But, as Bell Hooks asks, "in what other case have we ever had a wealthy black man being tried for murder?" Rodney King was a black man to his captors before he was anything else; O. J. Simpson was, first and foremost, O. J. Simpson. Kathleen Cleaver observes, "A black superhero millionaire is not someone for whom mistreatment is an issue." And Spike Lee acknowledges that the police "don't really bother black people once they are a personality." On this point, I'm reminded of something that Roland Gift, the lead singer of the pop group Fine Young Cannibals, once told a reporter: "I'm not black, I'm famous."

SIMPSON, too, was famous rather than black; that is, until the African-American community took its lead from the cover of *Time* and, well, blackened him. Some intellectuals are reluctant to go along with the conceit. Angela Davis, whose early-seventies career as a fugitive and a political prisoner provides one model of how to be famous *and* black, speaks of the need to question the way

“O. J. Simpson serves as the generic black man,” given that “he did not identify himself as black before then.” More bluntly, Baraka says, “To see him get all of this God-damned support from people he has historically and steadfastly eschewed just pissed me off. He eschewed black people all his life and then, like Clarence Thomas, the minute he gets jammed up he comes talking about ‘Hey, I'm black.’ ” And the matter of spousal abuse should remind us of another role-reversal entailed by Simpson's iconic status in a culture of celebrity: Nicole Brown Simpson would have known that her famous-not-black husband commanded a certain deference from the L.A.P.D. which she, who was white but not yet famous, did not.

“It's just amazing that we in the black community have bought into it,” Anita Hill says, with some asperity, and she sees the manufacture of black-male heroes as part of the syndrome. “We continue to create a superclass of individuals who are above the rules.” It bewilders her that Simpson “was being honored as someone who was being persecuted for his politics, when he had none,” she says. “Not only do we forget about the abuse of his wife but we also forget about the abuse of the community, his walking away from the community.” And so Simpson's connection to a smitten black America can be construed as yet another romance, another troubled relationship, another case study in mutual exploitation.

Yet to accept the racial reduction (“WHITES V. BLACKS,” as last week's *Newsweek* headline had it) is to miss the fact that the black community itself is riven, and in ways invisible to most whites. I myself was convinced of Simpson's guilt, so convinced that in the middle of the night before the verdict was to be announced I found myself worrying about his prospective sojourn in prison: would he be brutalized, raped, assaulted? Yes, on sober reflection, such worries over a man's condign punishment seemed senseless, a study in misplaced compassion; but there it was. When the verdict was announced, I was stunned—but, then again, wasn't my own outrage mingled with an unaccountable sense of relief? Anna Deavere Smith says, “I am seeing more than that white people are pissed off and black people are ecstatic. I am seeing the difficulty of that; I am seeing people having difficulty talking about it.” And many are weary of what Ishmael Reed calls “zebra journalism, where everything is seen in black-and-white.” Davis says, “I have the feeling that the media are in part responsible for the creation of this so-called racial divide—putting all the white people on one side and all the black people on the other side.”

Many blacks as well as whites saw the trial's outcome as a grim enactment of Richard Pryor's comic rejoinder “Who are you going to believe—me, or your lying eyes?” “I think if he were innocent he wouldn't have behaved that way,” Jamaica Kincaid says of Simpson, taking note of his refusal to testify on his own behalf. “If you are innocent,” she believes, “you might want to admit you have done every possible thing in the world—had sex with ten donkeys, twenty mules—but did not do this particular thing.” William Julius Wilson says mournfully, “There's something wrong with a system where it's better to be guilty and rich and have good lawyers than to be innocent and poor and have bad ones.”

The Simpson verdict was “the ultimate in affirmative action,” Amiri Baraka says. “I *know* the son of a bitch did it.” For his part, Baraka essentially agrees with Shapiro's rebuke of Cochran: “Cochran is belittling folks. What he's saying is ‘Well, the niggers can't understand the question of perjury in the first place. The only thing they can understand is, ‘He called you a nigger.’ ” He alludes to *Ebony's* fixation on “black firsts”—the magazine's spotlight coverage of the first black to do this or that—and fantasizes the appropriate *Ebony* accolade. “They can feature him on the cover as ‘The first Negro to kill a white woman and get away with it,’ ” he offers acidly. Then he imagines Farrakhan introducing him with just that tribute at the Million Man March. Baraka has been writing a play called “Othello, Jr.,” so such themes have been on his mind. The play is still in progress, but he *has* just finished a short poem:

Free Mumia!
O.J. did it
And you know it.

“Trials don't establish absolute truth; that's a theological enterprise,” Patricia Williams says. So perhaps it is appropriate that a religious leader, Louis Farrakhan, convened a day of atonement; indeed, some worry that it is all too appropriate, coming at a time when the resurgent right has offered us a

OUT OF MY WAY, STUPID!
W Miller

long list of sins for which black men must atone. But the crisis of race in America is real enough. And with respect to that crisis a mass mobilization is surely a better fit than a criminal trial. These days, the assignment of blame for black woes increasingly looks like an exercise in scholasticism; and calls for interracial union increasingly look like an exercise in inanity. ("Sorry for the Middle Passage, old chap. I don't know *what* we were thinking." "Hey, man, forget it—and here's your wallet back. No, really, I want you to have it.") The black economist Glenn Loury says, "If I could get a million black men together, I wouldn't march them to Washington, I'd march them into the ghettos."

But because the meanings of the march are so ambiguous, it has become itself a racial Rorschach—a vast ambulatory allegory waiting to happen. The actor and director Sidney Poitier says, "If we go on such a march to say to ourselves and to the rest of America that we want to be counted among America's people, we would like our family structure to be nurtured and strengthened by ourselves and by the society, that's a good point to make." He sees the march as an occasion for the community to say, "Look, we are adrift. Not only is the nation adrift on the question of race—we, too, are adrift. We need to have a sense of purpose and a sense of direction." Maya Angelou, who agreed to address the assembled men, views the event not as a display of male self-affirmation but as a ceremony of penitence: "It's a chance for African-American males to say to African-American females, 'I'm sorry. I am sorry for what I did, and I am sorry for what happened to both of us.' " But different observers will have different interpretations. Mass mobilizations launch a thousand narratives—especially among subscribers to what might be called the "great event" school of history. And yet Farrakhan's recurrent calls for individual accountability consort oddly with the absolution, both juridical and populist, accorded O. J. Simpson. Simpson has been seen as a symbol for many things, but he is not yet a symbol for taking responsibility for one's actions.

All the same, the task for black America is not to get its symbols in shape: symbolism is one of the few commodities we have in abundance. Meanwhile, Du Bois's century-old question "How does it feel to be a problem?" grows in trenchancy with every new bulletin about crime and poverty. And the Simpson trial spurs us to question everything except the way that the discourse of crime and punishment has enveloped, and suffocated, the analysis of race and poverty in this country. For the debate over the rights and wrongs of the Simpson verdict has meshed all too well with the manner in which we have long talked about race and social justice. The defendant may be free, but we remain captive to a binary discourse of accusation and counter-accusation, of grievance and counter-grievance, of victims and victimizers. It is a discourse in which O. J. Simpson is a suitable remedy for Rodney King, and reductions in Medicaid are entertained as a suitable remedy for O. J. Simpson: a discourse in which everyone speaks of payback and nobody is paid. The result is that race politics becomes a court of the imagination wherein blacks seek to punish whites for their misdeeds and whites seek to punish blacks for theirs, and an infinite regress of score-settling ensues—yet another way in which we are daily becoming meta and meta. And so an empty vessel like O. J. Simpson becomes filled with meaning, and more meaning—more meaning than any of us can bear. No doubt it is a far easier thing to assign blame than to render justice. But if the imagery of the court continues to confine the conversation about race, it really will be a crime. ♦

*"Are we thinking here, or is this just so much pointing and clicking?"*

## A CRITIC AT LARGE

# THE FALL GUY

*Buster Keaton's genius turned slapstick and catastrophe into comic gold.*

BY ANTHONY LANE

On a dark night, in a nameless town, a nameless man decides to end his life. He sees a pair of headlights approaching. Why not make it quick, step out in front of a car? He walks out into the road and goes into a half crouch, with hands on his knees and eyes squeezed tight like someone who can feel a sneeze coming on. The two headlights hurtle toward him and go on hurtling, passing harmlessly by on either side: two motorcycles. The man opens his eyes, straightens up, and walks off as if nothing had happened. That is his problem: he wants something to happen, but nothing keeps on happening, in a big way.

The scene comes from "Hard Luck," a two-reel Buster Keaton movie made in 1921. The movie lasts twenty-two minutes, and was lost for more than sixty years. The final scene is still missing. The reconstructed film proved to be unreconstructed Keaton—a sequence of sight gags that would have little or no logical connection were it not for the man at the center of them. Whether he is suffering the impact of the gags or willing them into being is hard to tell, but they flock toward him as though his very nature were a kind of magnetic north. "Hard Luck" is dumbly plotted, cheaply shot, and drizzling with age; there is no reason it should do anything except stutter along. And yet it flows. Again and again, the hero tries to do away with himself—by swallowing a bottle of poison that turns out to be bootleg hooch, by lying in front of a tram that never reaches him—with a will that verges on the heroic. He courts death as if his life depended on it. Still, there is no despair on his face, not a whiff of melodrama. He seems to favor the minor-league emotions: determination, embarrassment, a gentle breeze of ennui. So what *is* it with this guy? Where does he fit in?

Nearing the millennium, we like to think that black comedy is our specialty, our big number—that, after all that's happened, we've earned it. But Buster Keaton was there before us. If you're looking for irony and fatigue, high speed and hard luck, the strong toil of grace, then Keaton is your man.

Joseph Frank Keaton was born on October 4, 1895, in Piqua, Kansas. This year, therefore, we are celebrating two important anniversaries: Keaton was born a hundred years ago, and so was cinema. The more one thinks about this coincidence, the happier it seems. It has been agreed, for the sake of argument, that the images projected by the Lumière brothers in 1895 signalled the fact that pictures were now officially in motion. Since then, it's been a blast. No other medium has accelerated with such outrageous brio from a crude new technology to a fully expressive art form; on the other hand, many movie lovers fear that it may have stalled along the way and is currently heading with equal haste in the opposite direction.

In a sense, it's all Buster Keaton's fault. He was just too good, in too many ways, too soon. We call his films comedies, but the more closely you inspect them the more convincingly he seems to have invaded and mastered other genres. No action thriller of the last, blood-streaked decade has matched the kinetic violence at the end of "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," in which a storm pulls Keaton through one random catastrophe after another. Anyone who thinks that the movie-within-a-movie is a recent conceit, the province of "The Purple Rose of Cairo" and "Last Action Hero," should check out "Sherlock Jr.," a film in which Keaton *dreams* himself into another film: he strolls up the aisle of the theatre, hops into the action, and fights to keep up with its breakneck changes of scene. As for "The General,"

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

*Buster Keaton, New York City, September 18, 1952.*

where do you start? It's a film about a train, but it's also a spirited romance, peppered with bickering and longing, and its evocation of the Civil War period has never been surpassed. Keaton's transformation from a hapless Ashley Wilkes type into a manly serial kisser—a Rhett without the bombast—is not something that he needs to sell us. We just believe it. He is the first action hero; to be precise, he is a small, pale-faced American who is startled, tripped, drenched, and inspired into *becoming* a hero.

These days, we look down on physical comedy; critics like to say that movies "descend" into slapstick. Physical comedy has gained a reputation for being cheap, an easy way out for directors and performers when their ideas run dry. The old skills seem to be fading: nobody knows how to take a fall anymore, and some of what we sit through is cruder than the antics of the Keystone Cops. When the Cops pitched off trucks or bopped their adversaries over the head, the craziness was hardly sophisticated, but the energy felt appropriate to the spirit of a quickening industry: every frame was a space to be filled, like a shopwindow. Early movies didn't descend; they rose to the occasion of a speedy, febrile art that was itself founded on the spinning of a reel, whereas the physical gags of today (what you can find of them) come across as mean and tired.

*Gizmos and gags: Buster unites man and machine in a publicity shot for "The Cameraman" (1928).*

PHOTOFEST

We know that Buster Keaton entered the world in the fall of 1895. The exact point at which he entered the world of entertainment is harder to pin down, although there is a photograph that shows his father, Joseph Keaton, in blackface, with a baby Buster plumped down between his legs. Joe came from Quaker stock, but he grew up a drifter and a brawler, with a high kick that could break a man's jaw; he quit his home state of Indiana and wound up in Frank Cutler's Comedy Company, a troupe that worked the new small towns south of the Cherokee Strip. He also fell for Cutler's daughter, Myra; they married in 1894, and made a meagre living in travelling medicine shows. In 1899, they moved their act to New York to try their luck in vaudeville; within a year, "The Two Keatons" became "The Three Keatons"; soon after that, the billing changed to "BUSTER, assisted by Joe & Myra Keaton." The toddler had become a professional performer at an age when most people are still amateurs at going to the toilet. Buster was once sent to school, but the experiment lasted less than a day.

It was no surprise that he came to the attention of the Gerry Society, which fought against the injustices of child labor. As part of the act, his father would grab hold of a suitcase handle stitched to the back of Buster's jacket, swing him through the air, and let go. Sometimes the boy would be spread flat and pushed around the stage as if he were a mop: Joe wiped the floor with him. In an effort to deter the Gerry investigators, Joe took his son to the mayor of New York; Buster was stripped bare and inspected for bruises. No one believed that a youngster should be kicked and hurled for a living, let alone that he might *enjoy* the experience, and might relish the refinement of his skills. There is an argument that the famous Keaton expression is not just restrained but close to tears, that he is musing on miseries past and is bent on blanking them out, and that his screen persona was essentially rooted in a form of child abuse. The trouble with this theory is that the adult Buster was anything but blank: within the quietude of his gaze—backstage, behind the eyes—there is a chorus of emotions, many of them running close to eagerness and joy. In Keaton's universe, violence means no harm; the scene from "Battling Butler," in which he pummels a guy into submission, is weirdly out of character and is difficult to watch. In any case, he revered his parents and learned almost everything he knew about comedy from their example. Joe Keaton was later employed in some of his son's movies, together with other cronies from vaudeville.

Slapstick toughened and seasoned the young Buster. The bruises mattered less than the muscles. Keaton's pictures often play on his shortness (he was five feet six) or play it up by casting him against men shaped like grain silos. The archetypal Buster plot—the one that fuels "College," "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," "The Navigator," and a host of shorts—involves the weedy, hapless loner who slides into the jaws of fate, finds undreamed-of strength, and gets the girl. It is a measure of Keaton's delicacy as an actor that we can believe in this transformation, because he himself was a strongman from the start. When the shy scholar of "College," taunted by his beloved, finally strips down to running gear and joins the other athletes, we notice just how sinewy and streamlined he really is. The shape never changed: from the time Buster was a boy, that amazing, rectangular head remained too big for the torso beneath it. The mismatch is just right: you feel sure that the body will never fly out of control while the mind is in command. No wonder Buster balked at doubles; it is just conceivable that another man, with similar training, might have survived the ordeals that assault a Keaton hero, but no one else could have borne them with such equanimity. As Buster explained, "stuntmen don't get laughs."

Keaton was not unbreakable. While working on "The Electric House," in 1922, he smashed an ankle; two years later, in "Sherlock Jr.," the gush from a water tank blew him off the top of a train. The impact knocked him out, and gave him gruesome headaches; in 1935, an X-ray showed that he had broken his neck. Having been reared as a human beach ball, Keaton was able to survive jolts that would have killed a normal, non-rubberized person. The weird thing is that, unlike Jerry Lewis or Jim Carrey, he never melts or weakens into bendiness. The traditional Buster stance demands that he remain upstanding, full of backbone, looking ahead. His moral attitude and his physical attitude are indistinguishable; where Lewis and Carrey cringe and swank, Keaton holds firm. Nothing is more exhilarating than the great sequence in "The General" in which he clambers onto the roof of his locomotive and leans gently forward to scan the terrain, with the breeze in his hair and adventure zipping toward him around the next bend. It is the *angle* that you remember: the figure perfectly straight but tilted forward, like the Spirit of Ecstasy on the hood of a Rolls-Royce.

THE theatrical career went on until 1917. The Three Keatons found fame, toured England, and then broke up. And then: "I was walking down Broadway—down along Eighth or someplace—and I met an old vaudevillian, and he was with Roscoe Arbuckle. Roscoe asked me if I had ever been in a motion picture, and I said, 'No, I haven't even been in a studio.' And he said, 'Well, come on down to the studio Monday and do a scene or two with me and see how you like it.' "

That, at least, is the story that Keaton gave to an interviewer in 1958. His biographer Rudi Blesh makes it more prosaic: in "Keaton" (1966) Blesh writes that the vaudevillian took twenty-one-year-old Buster to visit the Colony Studio, on East Forty-eighth Street, where three pictures were being shot—one with Roscoe (Fatty) Arbuckle; one with Constance Talmadge, starring opposite the charmingly named Harrison Ford; and one with Norma Talmadge. (Luckily, no one told Buster that four years later he would marry the third Talmadge sister, Natalie, and that all three sisters *and their mother* would move in with him.) Buster started work with Arbuckle the next day.

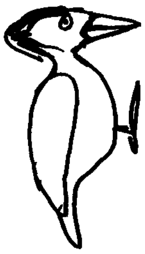
It is typical of Keaton that his first instinct was to find out precisely what happened inside a camera. He was a gadget freak, stirred by his good fortune at being on hand for the youthful, exploratory years of a new mechanical medium; you sometimes feel that his movies' obsession with machines is a homage to that era. The guy who practically crawled into Arbuckle's camera is the same guy who stuffed his films with trains and boats and whiled away his later years by rigging up vast contraptions designed to pour a shot of bourbon or crack walnuts. One of the disappointments of Keaton's first full-length feature, "The Three Ages," is that much of it is set in Stone Age and Roman times, both of which are sadly gizmo-free. He does his best, and piles up the chariot gags, but it isn't until he hits the modern era that you sense him relaxing into the chaos of mechanized society. He drives a low-grade automobile over a bump in the road, and the car just *crumbles* beneath him. Rerun it on video, in slow motion, and you can see Buster riding the collapse like a surfer, hanging on to the steering wheel, coming beautifully to rest as the wave of wreckage breaks.

None of this is an indictment of the industrial age. It is Chaplin who took that noble, simpleminded line: when he walked away from the conveyor belt in "Modern Times," his hands still tightening an invisible bolt, the joke implied that the human soul was under threat from machinery, and that man must strive to escape its grip. Keaton, more thoughtfully, identifies an element of play: his work suggests that man and machine are a good match—that man, on occasion, can even come out on top. In "Sherlock Jr." we see him perched precariously on the handlebars of a fast-moving police motorbike; far from panicking, he soon settles into this new arrangement, considers his options, crosses his legs as if he were perched on a sofa, and prattles amiably to the cop. In his coolness, his love of improvisation, his casual reluctance to be crushed, Keaton moves further away from the querulous, jumpy genius of Chaplin and closer to someone like Fred Astaire, who could come upon the chugging pistons of a ship's engines and hear within a matter of seconds the excitable rhythms of a new dance.

Buster worked with Arbuckle on and off for three years. Together, they made fifteen two-reelers, some of them disconcerting to watch. For one thing, Keaton was still in the process of paring down the smile. Most people think of him as the essence of deadpan; they should take a look at "Fatty at Coney Island" and catch the chirpy, shining grin that splits Buster's face. You can see a milder version of it in "The Saphead," his first starring feature, when Buster's character reads his name in a newspaper. His smile is not unattractive; it just turns him into a different being. If, from 1920 on, Keaton chose not to beam at the surrounding world, it was not because he was privy to some unrelieved grimness but because a steady, tight-lipped expression is the only look that remains, like a good suit, suitable for all occasions. It respects, even expects, catastrophe, but it also honors sweetness—especially when Keaton closes his eyes, as if to sniff an unseen rose.

"The Saphead" is about a wealthy idler who can barely summon the energy to become a profligate; "The High Sign," made the same year, saw Keaton cast as a rootless bum. The opening title reads like Camus for cowboys: "Our Hero came from *Nowhere*—he wasn't going *Anywhere* and got kicked off *Somewhere*." Taken together, the two movies demonstrate Buster's enviable talent for playing every octave of the social scale. He didn't hate the rich, and he refused to rain pity on the poor. With mawkish cunning, Chaplin had turned the Little Tramp into a potent symbol of the downtrodden; Keaton, less consciously, embarked upon a decade of films that would range across the American experience, from the Wild West to the Stock Exchange. All he asks of his characters, whatever their status, is that they not spurn the opportunity for self-reliance. Rollo Treadway, the hero of "The Navigator," numbed by his millions, drifts through the days like a sleepwalker and uses his chauffeur to get from one side of the street to the other; it is only when his yacht is set adrift, when he is all at sea, that he can wake himself up and function as a complete being. Chaplin would never have given Rollo the chance; he would have used the character in passing and knocked his hat off with a rock. Chaplin was reluctant to shake off his Englishness or his touchiness about class, and his work represents the last gasp of Victorian melodrama; Keaton drew the first breath of modernism in film, and was the first—Griffith notwithstanding—to show why America would be the movies' natural home.

By 1920, Keaton was making his own pictures, under the aegis of Arbuckle's producer, Joseph M. Schenck. Over the next eight years, they made nineteen shorts and ten full-length features together—from "The High Sign" to "Steamboat Bill, Jr." Keaton is invariably listed as a co-director and, occasionally, as co-writer, with friends such as Eddie Cline and Clyde Bruckman. Bruckman told Rudi Blesh, "I was at Buster's house or he at mine four or five nights many a week—playing cards, horsing around, dodging the issue. Then, at midnight, to the kitchen, sit on the sink, eat hamburgers, and work on gags until three in the morning." The perfect life, surely: a utopia of creative brotherhood. But Bruckman added a twist. "Those wonderful stories were ninety percent Buster's," he said. Keaton tempts us toward the auteur theory but proves that it is not incompatible with a loose-limbed habit of collaboration. He reminds you of Orson Welles: whatever the movie, he spiced it with his own obsessions. Even the earliest shorts proceed on the understanding that tumult is all the wilder for being arrested in mid-flow, and that a concentration of closeups should be regularly dissolved by the discreet retreat of the camera. Keaton's long shots, in which a forlorn figure dashes through serene open spaces, are the deep breaths of an artist who knows the value of the long view.



Keaton's narrative beat was partly a matter of technique. Until he came along, cameras had been undercranked for slapstick, thus insuring that the projected image was twice as fast—and therefore, it was believed, twice as funny—as human activity in real time. Keaton saw neither the justice nor the logic of this practice, and he was the first, according to Bruckman, to shoot comedy at standard speed; the life that he saw around him didn't need whipping up—it was funny enough as it was. Moreover, it was funny even when it was boring; Keaton's real daring lies less in the technical advances he devised than in the moral progress he made with them. There is nothing more adventurous in the Keaton œuvre than the low-key, unhurried opening of "The Goat," a 1921 short, in which a starving Buster is sent to the back of a breadline, on the sidewalk outside a clothing store. Not realizing that the two men in front of him are mannequins, he stands and waits, and the camera waits with him. He shuffles his feet, leans against the wall, clasps his hands behind his back, and so on. This seems to me a moment of revolution: after the Keystone Cops, and after the universal truths, or truisms, that rang out so majestically from "Intolerance," here is a guy doing zilch. The movies have learned to tolerate ordinary existence, and even to celebrate its paltry pleasures; Keaton practices what Griffith preached.

Nothing, I guess, is more ordinary than getting married and settling down. In "One Week" (1920), a strong candidate for the perfect short film, Keaton takes homemaking literally. Starting from a plain, gag-rich premise—a pair of newlyweds are given a house in kit form, but with the wrong set of instructions—he fashions a surreal nineteen-minute epic of trial and error, which also happens to be a touching portrait of a marriage. Some commentators think that Keaton's pictures are let down by the slenderness of female characterization; Daniel Moews, in his dogged 1977 study "Keaton: The Silent Features Close Up," thinks that Buster's women are "late Victorian hangovers in the long tradition of medieval courtly romance" and that "the heroines, desirable though they may be, exist only as pretexts for initiating his adventures." No one could watch "One Week" and agree with Moews. The actress playing the bride, Sybil Seely, has that perky, outdoorsy, try-anything hardihood that separates the women of pre-Hays Code cinema from the lacquered, innuendo-bound creatures who arrived later. She is Buster's unquestioned equal in the film; they pull through together. In one extraordinary scene, Seely is in her bath, the tops of her breasts exposed; she drops the soap on the floor, grins at us, and reaches out for it. At this point, a hand covers the lens, although Seely doesn't look as if she would mind either way. So there you are: near-nudity and a self-conscious camera back in 1920. You wonder just how much Jean-Luc Godard had to invent.

If only Keaton's first marriage had been such bliss. In 1921, he married Natalie Talmadge, and three weeks after the wedding the happy couple posed for a publicity shot in *Photoplay:* Buster sits beside her sporting a ball and chain. They had two sons—Joseph, born in 1922, and Robert, born in 1924—and Natalie would pain Keaton deeply by changing the boys' surname to Talmadge after she divorced him, in 1932. If there was misery on both sides, Keaton, at least, knew better than to let it sour his movies. In "Seven Chances" (1925), the prospect of marriage becomes pure farce: Buster plays a man of such eligible wealth that the climax finds him running away from an entire churchful of wannabe brides. When he finally gets the girl he really wants, his attempts to snatch a crowning kiss are blocked by the successful efforts of the minister, the bride's mother, the best man, and a pet Dalmatian. His frustration is a good joke, but its chief function is to deny us the comfort of a major chord—to scrub the last traces of sentimentality from what threatens to become a love story. Maybe this is why Keaton leaves some viewers cold: his pictures suggest that love, like courage, must be proved in action. Hearts are there to be won, not warmed. It was a tough job for any woman, romancing the stone face.

In celebration of Buster's centennial, a New York company called Kino on Video has issued three boxed sets of Keaton videos: thirty silent films in all, freshly transferred to tape. The quickies are a revelation, and the full-length features reassert their power; viewers will be amazed at how little has dated. If we are honest, we should admit to ourselves that the acting styles of early Hollywood now look overheated—that some of Garbo's swoons, in short, can make us giggle. Even in a classic such as F. W. Murnau's "Sunrise" (1927), the hero is still indicating anguish by gripping the hair at the sides of his head and staring saucer-eyed at absolutely nothing. In Keaton's work there is none of this. He pioneered the art of underacting. Heaven knows, he gave his heroes plenty to react to; the fact that they chose to scoot away from trouble or else to face it with tranquillity was a sign that film was ceasing to be merely an extravaganza. Keaton's character is more interesting than his surroundings; whatever they toss at him, he doesn't rave or gape—he doesn't hype what movies can do. In the final scenes of "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," what matters is not the ferocity of the wind: it is the tiny leap that Buster gives as he pushes into that wind—the endless, fruitless comedy of needing to press on. "Such frustration in that little body!" Louise Brooks once said.

After "The Navigator" became a smash hit, in 1924, Keaton was given a contract for six features: two a year, at twenty-seven thousand dollars per picture—serious money in those days. He built the Italian Villa, one of the grandest properties in Beverly Hills, and spent fourteen thousand dollars moving a line of trees from the front to the back. By the time filming began on "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," in 1927, Buster's work was netting him an annual income of two hundred thousand dollars: nothing could go wrong. Needless to say, everything went wrong. "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," his final masterpiece, foundered at the box office, as "The General" had done the year before. In 1928, Joe Schenck dissolved Buster Keaton Productions and handed the outfit over to his brother Nicholas, at M-G-M. There Irving Thalberg grasped the genius of Keaton straight off, but it flew right past Louis B. Mayer, who, true to form, failed to see what was so funny about the man. The well-oiled new mechanisms of the dream factory soon snagged on someone like Keaton, who hired people because they could bat ideas around instead of writing a script, because they were good at cards, and because they were his friends. According to Keaton's third wife, Eleanor, "His guys all played baseball, and if they'd be stuck for a gag or something, they would go out and play ball. And then somebody'd say, 'Oh, hey, I know how to do that,' and they'd go back to work. One of the first things Buster did was get a ball club together at M-G-M. And Louis B. Mayer wouldn't stand for that."

*"So, we look to the fourth quarter as a time of healing."*

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Keaton made one good movie for M-G-M, "The Cameraman," and then began to slide. In 1930, he made his first starring talkie, "Free and Easy." There was nothing wrong with what Eleanor Keaton calls "his bass-baritone gravelly voice"; he never shared the indignity of John Gilbert, the silent, smoldering Romeo who opened his mouth and instantly changed into Tweety Pie. Keaton didn't object to words; he just didn't *need* them. Unhindered by dialogue, he had floated movies to the limits of their form. Where could he go from there? Earthbound and unwanted, he became a serious drinker and then a complete joke; his last film for the studio before it fired him, in 1933, was the sadistically titled "What, No Beer?" Natalie filed for divorce; in 1934, just to round out the dreadful burlesque, Keaton was declared bankrupt. He entered a sanitarium and wound up marrying a nurse named Mae Scriven—"in an alcoholic stupor," according to the Keaton scholar Jim Kline, although the pair went on to live together for two years. In 1937, in a spasm of generosity, M-G-M took him on again—this time as a gag writer—on a starting salary of a hundred dollars a week. This was like hiring Shakespeare to paint scenery. It is upsetting to follow the chart of Keaton's decline, and difficult to fix its lowest trough; I would suggest the sight of Buster caught up in a pie fight during a 1939 comedy about the early days of movies, "Hollywood Cavalcade." By that time, it was commonly thought that this was what silent stars had done: they had chucked custard pies. The truth, of course, was that not once in all the pictures that he made in the twenties had Buster Keaton thrown a single custard pie.

THE rehabilitation came late, but not too late. In 1938, over a bridge table, he met a blonde. Eleanor Norris was nineteen at the time, a hoofer at M-G-M. She had never seen a Buster Keaton movie. They were married in 1940, and it was Eleanor who set Buster back on the track and saw it carry him to his final fame—to what he eloquently described as "that genius bullshit." These days, Eleanor Norris Keaton lives in a condo in North Hollywood, and I visited her there on a roasting August day. To knock at the door of her house is a curious sensation: you half expect the front of the building to swing down and fall on top of you, tugged by the spirit of slapstick past. But I made my way safely up the stairs, past Japanese posters of Buster's best-known films. At the top stood Mrs. Keaton, spry and immaculate at seventy-seven, and rightly protective of her husband's reputation.

She wasn't the first person to want to look after the guy. "He must have had fifteen or twenty mothers and fathers," she recalled. "I guess they'd seen this helpless creature on the screen, so everybody adopted him and set out to take care of him." No one understood more clearly than Eleanor Keaton, though, that the helplessness was an act. "He never played for sympathy. If they wanted to feel sorry for him, that was their problem, not his," she said, adding, "Chaplin was just the opposite." Yet, as we sat there drinking iced tea and talking about Buster Keaton, I found my take on the man beginning to shift and fray. Even if he wasn't vulnerable, there was still something disturbing in his eagerness to take the rap. The sequences in "Cops" and "Seven Chances" in which he was harried by howling mobs sprang directly from Keaton's own fear. "Couldn't stand crowds," his widow said, and she went on to recount a time when an aging Buster gave the slip to adoring fans at the Cinémathèque in Paris, ducked down an alley, and threw up with nerves. The all-American star was almost English, sometimes, in his desire to evade confrontation. "I guess he just didn't want to make waves," Mrs. Keaton said. "If somebody dropped a glass and broke it in the kitchen, you know, he'd figure out a way it would be his fault. He knew that he'd wrecked his own career with drink." It's a bizarre turnaround: involved in every minute of his movies, Keaton can take more solitary credit for his achievements than any other filmmaker, and yet he behaved as if everything were his fault—as if the thousands of pratfalls were a punishment for irredeemable crimes, most of which he had never committed. Keaton hated to make a scene, and out of that distaste rose some of the most elegant scenes ever filmed.

Buster cut back on the drink, but he kept on smoking two packs a day. The war years were among the leanest of his life; Marion Meade, in her new biography, "Buster Keaton: Cut to the Chase," cites an M-G-M memo of 1942 that describes Buster as almost destitute. Not so, says Meade: Eleanor was still dancing for a living, after all, and Buster's principal daily duty was to drive his wife to the studios. After the war, he found a new career in Europe performing old vaudeville routines, and picked himself a few delicious minor roles: one of the bridge players in "Sunset Boulevard," a sorrowful presence opposite Chaplin in "Limelight." But true salvation arrived toward the end of the forties, in the squat shape of television; at the age of fifty-four, Buster refreshed some old slapstick for "The Ed Wynn Show." On the strength of this, he was awarded his own program, which ran for four months at the start of 1950; for the rest of his life, he made good money from TV appearances (Ed Sullivan, Steve Allen, Johnny Carson) and commercials.

Keaton's late works are a mixed bag. On the one hand, there is his 1964 slot for Budweiser; on the other, there is the exotically titled "Film" (1965), the only movie written by Samuel Beckett. Buster plays the anonymous, self-haunting wreck who scuttles through the twenty-two minutes of action, or inaction. We do not see him head on until the closing frames; he seems to be summoning both the courage to look himself in the face and the almost irretrievable memory of what that face once was. "Film" is not widely liked, or widely seen, perhaps because it offers a frightening spectre. How often does cinema, our shrine to beautiful people, dare to reveal the unstoppable blighting of beauty, let alone reveal it to the blighted themselves?

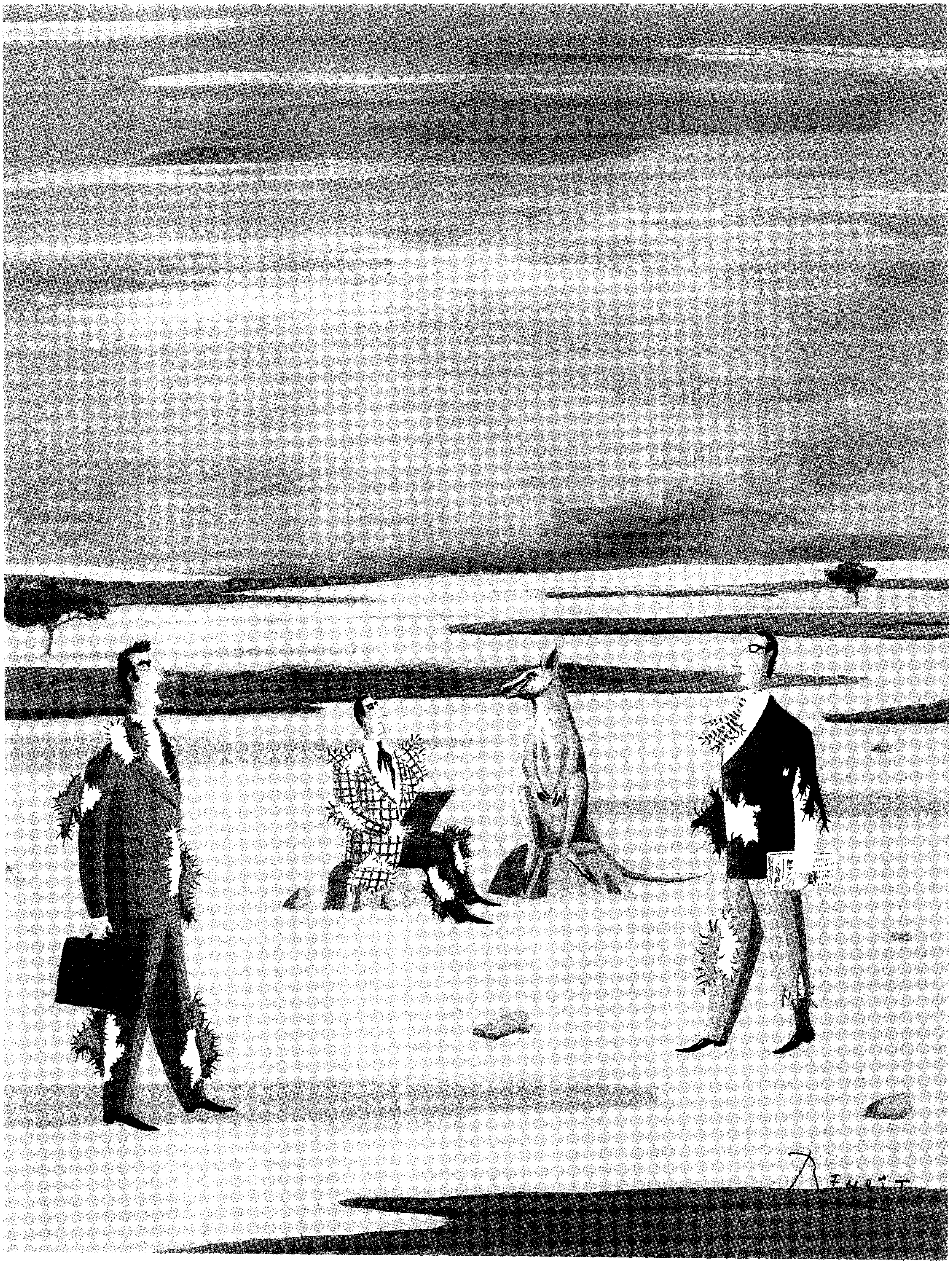
Buster Keaton died on February 1, 1966, and was buried with a rosary and a deck of cards. It's the neatest possible combination—a little light sinning with built-in penance, and a guarantee of eternal good luck. Somewhere, high above the clouds, someone is getting skinned.

KEATON'S great pictures are, in the best sense, feature films; they are meditations on a face. Those deep-lidded, dark-rimmed eyes, the carved prow of the profile—no living person has *ever* looked like Buster Keaton. Louise Brooks said he was the most beautiful man she ever saw, and she wasn't exactly a frump herself. Risking absurdity, every Buster fan longs to read a story, or a genealogy, or a philosophical position into Keaton's aspect. You can't help it; once you catch his eye, there's no looking away. Viewed from the side, he has always reminded me of the solemn, grieving figures in Giotto's frescoes. The critic Stanley Cavell tries a different tack. "I see the speculation of Heidegger exemplified in the countenance of Buster Keaton," he writes. This would have been news to Buster, who never tried to exemplify anything except the art of landing on your butt without jarring your spine.

But even if Keaton didn't exemplify intellectual theories—there is nothing abstract about being crunched between two carriages of a train—his movies nevertheless send you into the realm of idle perplexity that is traditionally prowled by the intellect. By his own admission, Keaton wanted nothing more than to raise a laugh. But the regularity with which he *gets* that laugh, and the fact that he refuses to join in it, force you to marvel at his struggle for happiness in the teeth of a ridiculous fate. "Be like the headland against which the waves break and break: it stands firm, until presently the watery tumult around it subsides once more to rest. . . . The thing could have happened to anyone, but not everyone would have emerged unembittered. . . . The mind can circumvent all obstacles to action, and turn them to the furtherance of its main purpose, so that any impediment to its work becomes instead an auxiliary, and the barriers in its path become aids to progress." Thus Marcus Aurelius, in his "Meditations." It seems as clear an account of Buster Keaton as you will find, and it restores him to his status as the leading stoic of cinema. As Marcus makes plain, stoicism involves not willful gloom but a temperate acceptance of the eternal Heraclitean flux. For instance, the hero of "The Three Ages" flees a police station, runs up a fire escape to the roof, leaps toward the next-door building, misses the parapet, drops three stories through canvas awnings, and catches hold of a drainpipe, which then swings around a hundred and eighty degrees, rifling the hero through an open window and straight into a pole, down which he slides, coming to rest on the back of a fire engine, which moves off and hastens back to the very police station he started from. If that isn't eternal flux, I don't know what is.

The best comedy entails the near-avoidance of tragedy, a sidestep away from the cliff's edge. Buster Keaton knows where the edge is; in truth, he can't get it out of his mind. That is why his films give off such a weird, flexible maturity, a wisdom not set in its ways. Sitting through a score of them, I was left to wonder what kind of man would feel driven to create such a modest, ennobling body of work from close shaves. "A tremendously nice person, you know, but also a man of secrets," Orson Welles said of Keaton, adding, "I can't even imagine what they were." Keaton family legend had it that when Buster was nearly three years old a cyclone picked him up, blew him down a street, and deposited him gently four blocks away. The incident eventually wormed its way into "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," but the cyclone twisted deeper still. It is Keaton's Rosebud, you might say: impossible to verify, probably a tall tale, and by no means an explanation of the man. Yet, for all that, it is an image that flowers perennially throughout his work. He launches himself into one whirlwind after another—into car wrecks, capsizings, wars, and marriages—not so much to test his nerve or his aptitude as to savor the primal shock of coming through unharmed. Buster Keaton sleeps through bedlam. His eyes are the heart of the storm. ♦

# SKETCHBOOK · BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS

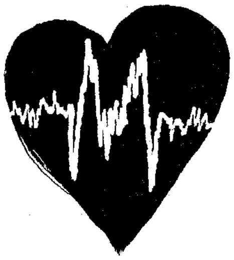


*In protest against nuclear testing, Australians are boycotting goods from France, including that country's famed couture.*—NEWS ITEM

## FICTION

# OLD LOVE AFFAIRS

### BY ALICE ADAMS



ILDLY upset by a phone call, Lucretia Baine, who is almost old but lively, comes back into her living room and stares for a moment into the large driftwood-framed mirror there, as though to check that she is still herself. Reassured, she smiles briefly, but continues to look at the mirror. In the soft, kindly lamplight—this is an early evening, in October—she is beautiful, still, even to her own harshly critical (large, green) eyes. But she knows perfectly well how she looks in her cruelly accurate bathroom mirror, first thing in the morning. Now, though, she looks all right, just upset; on the other hand, she may look better than usual. A little more color?

The disturbing call did not involve bad news; it was simply that Lucretia momentarily confused two men: Simon, whom she is crazy about (hopelessly, irreversibly, it seems), with Burt, who in his way is crazy about her. He loves Lucretia permanently, he says. Burt called, and just for an instant she thought he was Simon. Although she would have thought that two men more unlike did not exist, including their voices: Burt's deep and friendly, Midwestern, and Simon's very New England, Cambridge, slightly raspy.

"Crazy about." Like many people, Lucretia tends to think in the argot of her youth, in her case the forties. However, in this instance, the instance of Simon, the phrase seems accurate. At her age, to harbor such feelings is crazy indeed, and so, for that matter, are Burt's feelings for her, at his advanced age. Lucretia sighs. If only Simon were gay and in love with Burt the circle would be perfect, Shakespearean, she thinks. She sighs again, at what seems the silliness of it all. Simon is not gay, and the two men have never met. And she confused their voices only because she was expecting a call from Simon, sort of.

She did not do anything so crude as calling Burt "Simon," she was only a little cool at the onset of the conversation, cool with disappointment. But then poor Burt was probably used to cool, from her.

This living room of Lucretia's, though comfortable and exceptionally pretty, too often called "charming," in a sense resembles an archeological dig; there are layers, and remains. Traces of former husbands, three of them, two divorced, one dead. Tokens and presents from former lovers, quite a few of those, and from good friends, even more. And clear signs of a long and steadfast career: Lucretia is a reporter, a dedicated newspaperwoman. She has always worked in that way. The driftwood mirror is, in fact, a present from her longtime editor, now an elderly gentleman, who is gay—a much loved friend. Lucretia is less sure how she feels about the mirror.

Thus the room, which has never exactly been "decorated," is full of trophies, of carefully, tastefully selected *objets*, and of whimsically, impulsively bought *things*. A jumble of books and pictures, lots of framed photographs; anyone can see that Lucretia, young, was quite ravishing, and that most of the men she knew were tall and good-looking. Pots and vases of flowers stand about, more carefully arranged than they look to be: a great clump of growing gold chrysanthemums, smelling of earth, and of fall—and a slender silver vase of yellow roses, unscented but beautiful, chosen by Lucretia, for herself. She sometimes wonders how she could feel lonely in such a room, and, for that matter, in such a house, but sometimes she does.

Souvenirs, then, of love and friendship, but also of work. Lucretia has done a lot of travel writing for many years, as the assistant travel editor of her paper; shelves of travel books, as well as atlases and stacks of maps attest to those years, along with one wall's collection of masks, from Mexico and from Haiti, from India and Africa and Egypt. For idle pleasure Lucretia sometimes picks up a map of Italy, say, and goes over it carefully, naming out favorite towns to herself: Orvieto, Todi, Arezzo, Fiesole, as another person might read a familiar novel, happy to recognize Barsetshire again.

She was working throughout all those marriages and love affairs, which no doubt kept her sane (she herself is sure of this), but these days her work creates certain problems in "relationships" when the men involved are retired, as Burt is—Burt especially, demanding, intrusive (more "in love"), does not like to hear about Lucretia's deadlines, her work obligations. He has often suggested that she retire. What he means is, marry him. But Lucretia plans to postpone retirement for as long as she can, and in the meantime to take whatever assignments the paper offers. She has gone back lately to doing more interviews than travel writing, although last December she wrote a long piece about Christmas in Venice, lights in the Piazza San Marco, processions of gondolas. Extremely handsome gondoliers.

LUCRETIA'S first marriage took place when she was eighteen. There should be a law against marriages under thirty, she has sometimes thought, and said. Surely under twenty, and probably twenty-five. Jim, the young husband, was in law school; her second, Tommy, a reporter. Years later, speaking of marriage, she also said, "I married the first two times for sex. How dumb can you get?" Sometimes adding, "Tommy was dear—well, really they both were, Tommy and Jim. But Tommy drank so much, and besides, I really needed to get out of Boston."

She divorced poor, dear Tommy in Reno, and continued to San Francisco, where, with some money from a grandmother who providentially died around that time, she bought a small house in an alley on Telegraph Hill—

FILIP PAGOWSKI

with such a view! And she got a job on the *Examiner*.

There then followed for Lucretia many happy years. Telegraph Hill and, indeed, the whole city were seemingly full of the relatively young and unmarried. There was great cheap Italian food and wine in North Beach restaurants, and great cheap Chinese along Grant Avenue, Chinatown, with wonderful jazz at the Blackhawk, the Jazz Workshop. And good bars all over the place. Not to mention the prettily romantic city itself, a perfect backdrop. Lucretia had quite a few very pleasant but not serious love affairs; to herself, she thought, Well, good, I'm beginning to take sex not quite so seriously, it's just very good, very affectionate fun.

Sometimes, though, she was assailed by much darker thoughts, one of which persistently was: I'm really too old for all this silliness, my friends are doing serious things like bringing up children. (In those days thirty-five was viewed as too old for almost anything, including love affairs and certainly for children). Also, the fact was that she still did take sex seriously. Her affairs were never so casual as she tried to make herself believe; she sometimes suffered extreme pangs of missing whoever was just gone. Pangs of longing to hear from someone who did not phone. (In those days women were not supposed to telephone men.)

In those blacker moods Lucretia tended to forget her own considerable professional success. She was extremely good at her work; she had won citations and prizes, along with the occasional raise. And she liked it very much, especially the interviews, which she was more and more frequently assigned. She liked the work and mostly she liked her fellow-reporters. But as she waited for her phone to ring, waited for *him* to call, she forgot all that.

Jason was first described by Lucretia to her friends as "this terribly nice man who lives next door." A tall, skinny young (her age) architect from Tennessee, Jason had a serious girlfriend, Sally, who was not around much. Jason and Lucretia went to movies at the Palace and to the New Pisa for long, half-drunken dinners together; when she broke up with whomever, Jason was always comforting. And she was nice to him, making homey meals and listening a lot when he broke up with Sally, although by then Lucretia was seeing someone else.

By the time they fell in love and decided to marry, Jason and Lucretia had been friends for several years. So sometimes she wondered, Why didn't I know all along how I felt about Jason? Why did we waste all that time?

In both earlier marriages, to Jim and then to Tommy, sex had been the greatest bond. Especially with Tommy, a true sexual explorer, an inspired and tender lover—when sober. But then, he was so often drunk. With Jason, after the early raptures of mutual discovery, when in effect they both said, "You've been here all along, and I didn't *know*?"—after some months of that, the sexual energy between them seemed to taper off to a twice-a-week nice treat. Lucretia often felt that she was more enthusiastic than Jason was, that perhaps she was basically a sexier person, which she found a little embarrassing, although she still liked Jason better than anyone in the world. And for the three years of their marriage they were mostly happy, both busy with separate work, and enjoying vacation trips together.

Then, cruelly, Jason, who was still a relatively young man, was diagnosed with colon cancer. Invasive. Inoperable. But he took a long time dying, poor darling; near the end Lucretia moved him down to the living room, where he could see the friends he still wanted to see, and she could more easily bring him trays. He complained sometimes about sleeping down there alone, and so Lucretia would cuddle against him, there on the sofa.

Unhappily, that is what she most clearly recalled of Jason, his dying. How pitifully thin he was, his eyes so huge and needful. His bony hands. She remembered less of his good jokes and general good sense. Their trips. Lovely Italian wine and, at times, good sex.

MOURNING Jason, a truly loved and irreplaceable friend, Lucretia mourned, too, what she felt to be the end of love in her life. By that time she was in her early fifties; even to think of love affairs was ridiculous, despite what she read here and there. And so she did something very ridiculous, or worse: she fell violently in love with a man almost twenty years younger than she was, a beautiful Italian. Silvio. Not only twenty years younger but married, and a Catholic, of course.

Oddly enough, it was he who loved first. Or he who said it first, pressing her fingers as they held a wineglass, at lunch, in Fiesole. Looking up at him, she saw him laugh in a slightly embarrassed way, as he said, "You mustn't laugh, although it is a little funny. But I find myself seriously in love with you."

She did not laugh, but she smiled as she said, "Oh Silvio, come on—" even as her heart began to race, her blood to surge forward.

She was aware that they looked a little alike, she and Silvio, a Northern blond; some people must think them mother and son. Many people must think that.

Lucretia was staying at a small hotel on the Arno, not far from Harry's Bar; she had a penthouse room, with a lovely view of the river. From her balcony, in early evenings, she observed the long ovals formed by the bridges and their reflections in the water. She and Silvio had drinks there the first night he came to call, quite properly, to take her to Harry's for dinner. He was the friend of a friend; his wife and children were off at Viareggio. After they became lovers, they had drinks on that terrace every night.

"You have the most marvellous skin in the world," he told her. "Your back, and here. Like hot velvet." He laughed. "My poor English. I sound like the TV."

"Your English is fine."

"You are fine. However can I let you go?"

But he did. They let each other go at the end of Lucretia's two weeks: a week of exploratory friendship, another of perfect love. Or, vividly recalled by Lucretia in San Francisco, that is what it seemed, all perfect. Beautiful, sexy Silvio made love to her repeatedly, over and over, at night, and then again in the morning, before driving off to his own house across the river. Just love and sex; they never spoke of anything foolish and alien, like divorce. Only, once or twice Silvio asked her, "If I should come to San Francisco, you will remember?"

She laughed at him. "Always, my

darling." She feared that that would indeed be true. And she thought, Suppose he calls when I'm really old, too old to see him again, although I still remember? (She forgot that at that time he, too, would be much older.)

In her pretty Telegraph Hill cottage, then, with the doleful sound of foghorns strained through her dreams, Lucretia often woke to a painful lack of Silvio, a missing of him that was specifically sexual. And none of the obvious solutions to this crying need appealed to her at all. Only Silvio would do, and at times, at the worst and most painful pre-dawn hours, she thought of flying back to Italy. To Florence, where she would say to Silvio what seemed at the moment to be true: I can't live without you.

Of course, she could and did live without him, and all the prescribed cures worked. She joined a health club and exercised fiercely; she walked whenever and for as long as she could. She intensified her efforts at work; she took on more assignments. And she thought, Well, that will have to be that. Enough of sex and love. I've surely had my share, and maybe more. Except that every now and then she would read some tantalizing, romantic account of a woman even older than she was falling in love, getting married. Or an article about the sexual needs and activities of the old. "Geriatric Sex." Lucretia's very blood would warm and flare, and she would think, Well, maybe. Even as a more sensible voice within would warn her, Oh, come *on*.

"HE'S not exactly your type, but he's nice," said a friend, by way of introducing Burt McElroy into her life. "He's dying to meet you."

"Good Lord, why?"

"Oh, don't be like that. You're sort of famous here, and he likes blondes. His wife was blond."

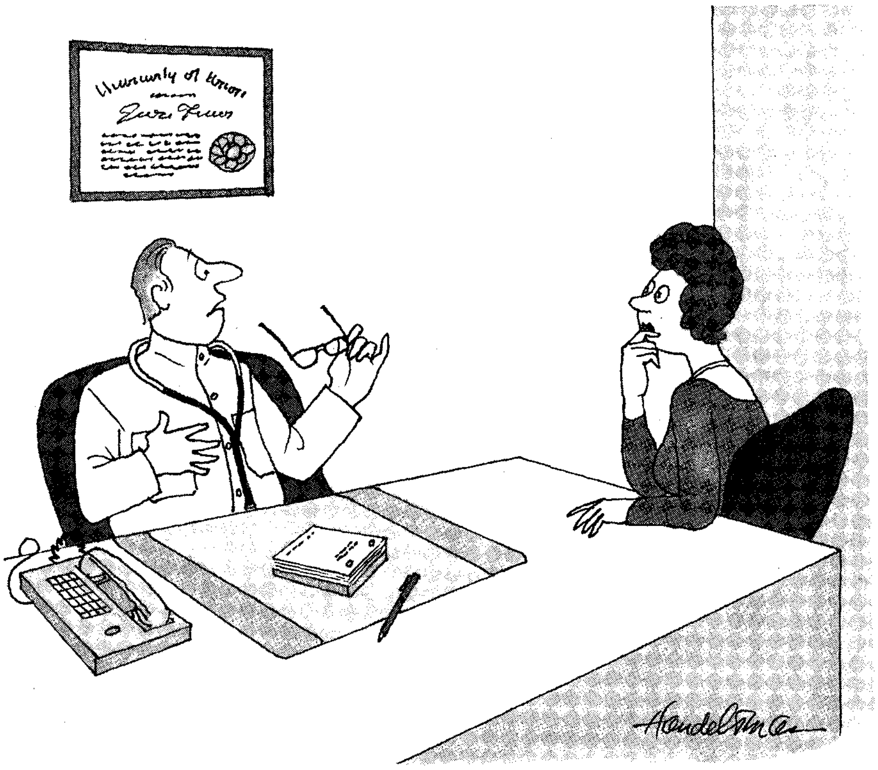
"Old blondes."

"His wife was older than you. They were married forever."

"I just don't feel like meeting anyone. I've given up all that stuff. Or maybe it's given me up."

"Well, just come for dinner. I won't lock you up in a closet together or anything." She added, "He was a trial lawyer. Now retired."

The lawyer, Burt McElroy, was a very large man, at least six three, and heavy. Thick white hair and small bright-blue eyes, a big white beard. Jolly, at first glance, but on second not jolly at all—in fact, somewhat severe. Censorious. And a little sad.



*"Why come to me? I'm only a humble doctor. You should see a health-care provider."*

At dinner that first night, at the house of the friend, Burt talked considerably about his wife, and a music foundation that he was establishing in her honor; apparently she had been a noted cellist. As he spoke of this dead woman, this Laura, Burt often looked at Lucretia, and she understood that he was announcing his feelings: I will never be really untrue to Laura.

And so she laughed, and was flirtatious with him; she, in her way, was saying, "Look, don't worry, I'll never be serious about you, either."

A few days later he called and asked her out to dinner. They went, and again he talked a lot about Laura and his children. At her door he said, "You know, you're really a knockout lady. As we said in my youth, 'I could really go for you.' "

"Oh, don't do that." She laughed up at him.

Later, thinking over the evening, Lucretia saw that she did not like him very much, despite his good qualities. He talked non-stop and rather self-importantly, a man accustomed to having the floor. To delivering opinions. And he did not listen well; in fact, he showed very little curiosity about her or anyone else. In short, he bored her; it was true, he was not her type at all. Except for being tall.

But she recognized, too, with some shame, a certain sexual pull in his direction. She looked forward to when he would kiss her. She put this down to sheer sexual starvation—it had been a long time since she had kissed anyone.

Their next dinner was less boring for Lucretia, because of the kissing that she now looked forward to. Just that, kissing, for the moment.

They went from a good-night kiss at the door to some very enthusiastic kissing on the sofa, and then, because such adolescent necking seemed ridiculous, at their ages, they went to bed.

Where, after several long, futile minutes of strenuous efforts on his part, and some effort on hers, Burt said, "I'm sorry. I had this prostate surgery, and I was afraid, but I had hoped—"

He was breathing hard, from exertion rather than from lust, Lucretia felt, as she thought, Poor guy, how embarrassing this must be. And depressing.

"Here," he said. "Let me—" He moved heavily, laboriously, down her body, positioning himself.

This is not something he usually does, Lucretia thought. Oral sex was not on the regular menu with Laura, the wife. Though, of course, Lucretia could have been wrong.

Feeling sorry for him, she pretended more pleasure than she actually felt; also, she wanted him to stop.

He moved up to lie beside her; he whispered into her ear, "It's wonderful to give you pleasure. You're wonderful."

WITHOUT spelling things out, without saying, "Look, I'm sorry, but I just don't like you very much. And sexually, I know it's not your fault and I'm sorry you have this problem, but it just doesn't work for me. I'm sorry I pretended," Lucretia hoped he would somehow understand. It did not occur to her until later that she could just have not seen him again, without apology.

Because he did not understand; he seemed now to want to see her all the time.

He took her to a banquet at which he was the guest of honor, long tables at the Fairmont Hotel, important political people. Men whose names, at least, she knew.

Lucretia, in her proper, "appropriate" black dress and her proper pearls, felt fraudulent; she wanted almost to announce: I'm not his lady friend, we are not, not, *not* getting married.

Burt's friends were roughly the same age as Lucretia was, like Burt himself, but they all seemed considerably older. She thought this could be delusional on her part, a delusion of youth, although she knew that she was generally a realist in that way. Vain, perhaps, she surely was that, caring too much about how she looked. But not kidding herself that she was a kid anymore.

She was not quite sure what this "older" quality consisted of; the best she could do was to describe it as a sort of settled heaviness, in both minds and bodies. They all looked pleasantly invulnerable, these people, Burt and his friends. No longer subject to much

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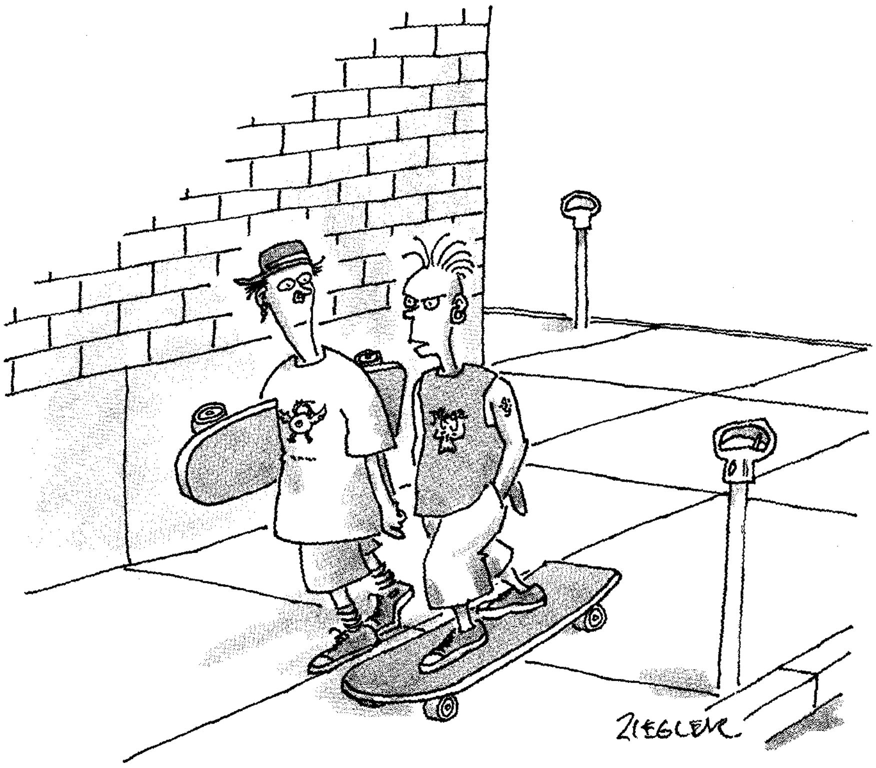


*"My life has been totally screwed up for years, but thus far no one has stepped forward to claim responsibility."*

• •

change. Or to passion. They did not much mind being overweight. Or that their expensive clothes were out of style.

Lucretia was not exactly smug about looking younger, and better; she knew it was largely accidental. She had been born pretty, and most of it had lasted. She ate almost what she wanted to, and nevertheless stayed fairly thin. She exercised, but not immoderately. She had not had anything "done" to herself in a surgical way, although she had thought about it.

"YOU'RE the sexiest woman I ever met. I'm crazy for you," Burt breathed into her ear.

"But—"

"Maybe a little cruise somewhere? Alaska, maybe, or Baja."

"Cruises—"

"Look, forget you're a travel writer. Just come along. Enjoy."

At the time of the cruise conversation (she had been on a number of cruises and very much disliked them all) Lucretia was much involved in writing a series of articles on shelters for battered women. She tried to tell Burt just how involved she was, how she cared about this particular piece.

Which did not go over well with Burt. "You should throw your weight around more," he told her. "Such as it is," and he laughed at his own mild joke. He often teased her about being what he called "underweight." "You've been there long enough and won enough prizes," he scolded. "You should be calling the shots. Not taking these really tough assignments."

I'm trying my best to call the shots with you, she thought, but did not say. And I like writing this piece, I like these women.

It was Burt's mouth that gave his face its severity, she decided. A small mouth, set and firm, made smaller-seeming by the surrounding beard. Had someone long ago said that small mouths were a bad sign, that they meant an ungiving, stingy nature? Actually, Burt was somewhat stingy, she had come to see; "careful" would be the kinder word, but he was super-careful, hyper-concerned with prices, costs, and he was surprised and somewhat annoyed by her ignorance of these things.

"It's not that I don't care what things cost," she tried to explain. "It's just that I get confused. I'm not good with numbers."

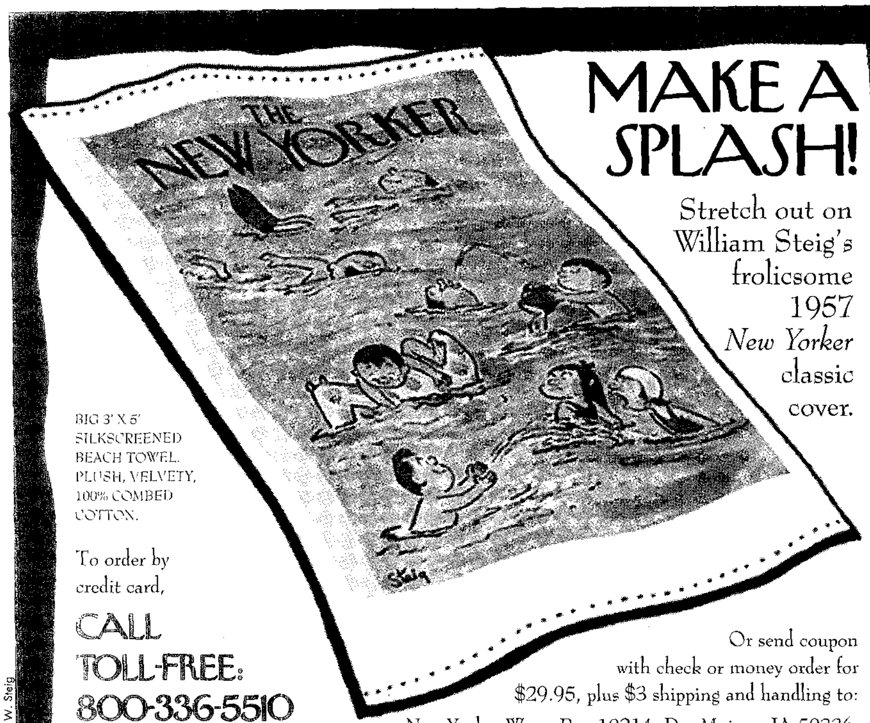
She tried going to bed with him a few more times, deeply knowing this to be a mistake but saying to herself that this time it might work; she might feel the pleasure she pretended (and she knew her pretense to be a serious error, politically incorrect). But, because of what he referred to as his "problem," Lucretia found it hard to put him off entirely; she understood how much his pride was involved, and she was reluctant to hurt that pride, and his feelings.

When he said, as he sometimes gloomily did, that if they broke up she would be the last woman in his life, she also understood that this had less to do with the great love that he professed for her than with his secret, his "problem." Lucretia, the only person privy to that secret, had to be the last in line.

IN the women's shelter Lucretia felt herself stretched between extreme emotions: between pity and fear, admiration, sometimes disgust. And occasionally sheer boredom: encouraged by her questions, some of these women would have talked for hours, not always coherently. But many of them were coherent, many interesting, some even funny. A marvellous elderly black woman—from Montana, of all places. A shrivelled Mexican-Jewish woman from L.A., with raucous, horrifying tales of endless boyfriends.

Lucretia's story in four installments ran in the Sunday paper, and most of her friends called to say how good it was, congratulations. Edwin, the editor and her old friend (the donor of the white-framed mirror), was highly pleased. Lucretia noted with interest that Burt was among those who did not call.

But Simon did call. Simon Coyne, at that time a voice from her remote past, from Jim and Cambridge days, law school. Although Simon had not been in law school. Eccentrically, everyone felt at the time, he was getting his doctorate in philosophy. Lucretia had heard that he married a Boston girl, and that broke up, and he married someone else. He taught in several small schools around the South. She had not really heard of him for years now, although when he called she realized that he had remained a romantic image in her mind: so tall and fair,



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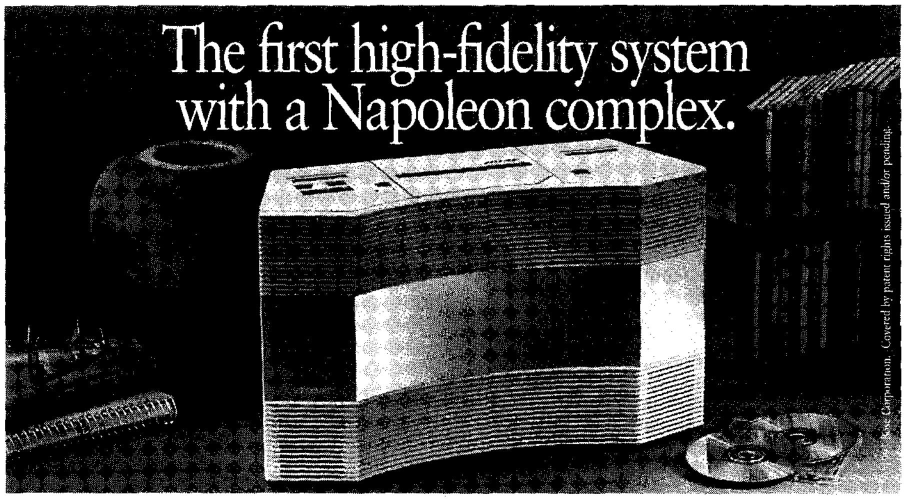

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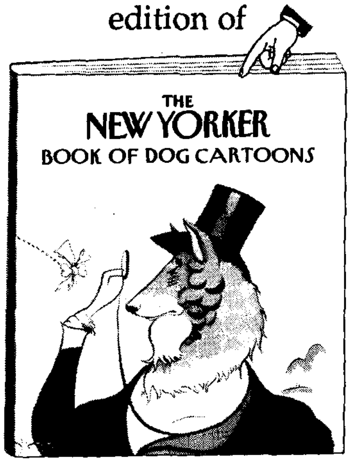

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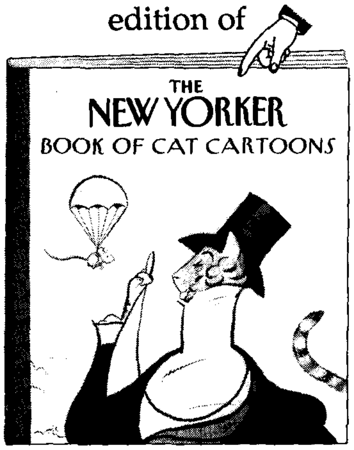

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with his pipe and tweeds and slightly odd way of speech. He was from Toronto, originally, Lucretia remembered, but he seemed more "English" than Canadian. More distant than Canadians generally were. More impeccably, remotely courteous.

He was teaching in Berkeley now, Simon said, and, yes, he liked it very much. He had found a nice house up on Euclid. His cats liked it, too; he had three. No, he was not married, but two of his three sons were living close by, as it happened.

Why didn't you call me before? Lucretia wanted to ask him. And, When can we see each other? Are you busy tonight? But she managed simply to say, "I'd love to see you, could you come over for supper sometime soon?"

He was terribly busy, as he was sure that she was, too, and besides, he insisted on taking her out to dinner. He would call.

And then she didn't hear from him for a couple of weeks, during which she saw Burt more than she had meant to. She did manage at last to say, "Look, Burt, we can have dinner sometimes if you'd like to, but we can't, uh, go to bed."

His whole face tightened. "I can hardly blame you for that. With my problem."

"It's not that. Honestly." And honestly it was not, not his impotence but his whole severe, self-centered, somewhat hostile character. She would have liked to say, I just don't like you very much, but she said instead, "My heart just isn't in it. I'm sorry."

SHE should have been rewarded, Lucretia believed, by a phone call from Simon, asking her out to dinner at last. But she was not. Burt called several times, still wanting to see her, and each time the phone rang she imagined that it would be Simon, but it was not. After some time of this she thought, I am much too old to wait for phone calls. And so she called him.

As she had more or less known that he would be, Simon was gallantly contrite. He had meant to call her, he had looked forward to seeing her, but had been struck down with crazy busyness. Department politics, plus high-level university trouble.

She reassured him. Perfectly all right—she had been busy, too. She invited him to dinner.

Oh, no, he said, they must go out, and he named a place that he had wanted to try. On the waterfront. Supposed to be excellent food, and also attractive. Hard to get reservations, but he would try, and call her back. They settled on a night. He did call back, to say that he could get a table only at seven, too early, but worth a try. He would pick her up at six-thirty; he would very much look forward to seeing her.

Like a nervous girl, Lucretia wondered what to wear. She was tempted to buy something new and wonderful, but she did not like the styles of that year. She settled on her best old black dress, which everyone liked.

At about six her phone rang, and Lucretia's heart sank, as she thought, It must be Burt or, worse, it's Simon, cancelling.

It was Simon, not cancelling but apologizing: A meeting was holding him up, could they possibly meet at the restaurant?

Driving down Broadway, through all the mess of lights and traffic, it occurred to Lucretia that she should have taken a cab; this way they would have to part publicly in some parking lot.

The restaurant was in an old wharf building, remodelled: low, dark ceilings, low lights, a long, rich bar and spectacular view of the Bay and the Bay Bridge, Oakland. Black water and huge, dim, looming boats.

At first, coming in, Lucretia could not see Simon, but then she said his name, and she was directed: there, he could have been no one else—tall, lean, fair Simon, with his narrow face, long nose, sardonic mouth. He was standing, smiling, and then coming toward her, hands outstretched to her.

They both said, "Oh, I'm so glad—" and stopped, and laughed.

Their dinner was much in that key, enthusiastically friendly, with good laughs. And relatively impersonal. Simon gracefully deflected anything verging on the personal, did not discuss his two marriages. Instantly sensitive to his mood and needs (this was one of her major skills), Lucretia was amusing. She told funny stories about the paper, about people she had interviewed. And they exchanged travel notes; they both

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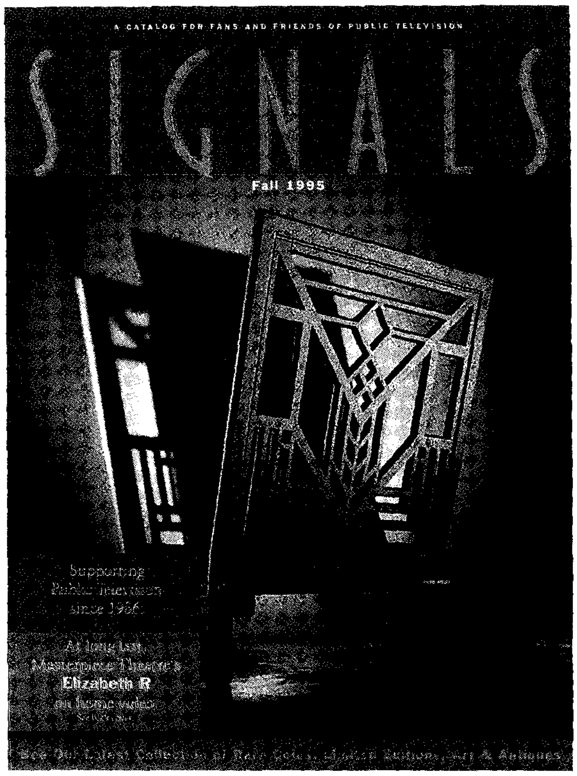
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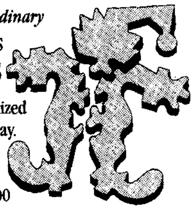

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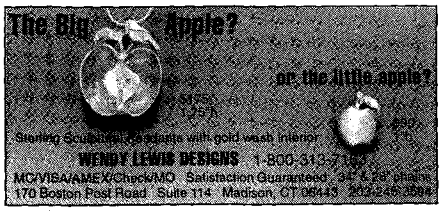

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loved the South of France, the North of Italy, and they laughed at the unoriginality of their tastes.

Simon's hair, though still thick, was actually white, not blond, as Lucretia had remembered. But, as she sat with him there, she was seeing not the elderly man whom another person might have described as distinguished but rather a young, blond, athletic Simon, with his fair hair and dark-brown eyes, his high, white intellectual brow, and his clever, sensual mouth. She was seeing and responding to a very young man, but also to an aging man, with white hair, whom she hardly knew. With whom she had an animated, no-depth conversation. But to whom she responded, deeply.

As she had imagined, and feared, they parted at her car, though, bending down to her, Simon asked anxiously, "Should I follow you home? See that you get there safely?"

"Oh no, I drive around all the time. I'll be fine."

A brush of mouths on cheeks. Good night.

LUCRETIA *knew* that she was much too old to wait for the phone to ring, and yet the next day, a Saturday, she found that that was what she was doing. Despite the fact that her answering machine was functioning, she kept herself within range of her telephone, postponing the small weekend tasks that would make enough noise to drown it out. Postponing neighborhood errands.

Until she thought, This is absolutely, utterly ridiculous. And she went out for an extended walk, doing errands, and even appreciating the beautiful fall day.

Coming home, though, and noting her machine's non-flashing light, no messages, she experienced a sinking of her spirits: he had not called.

This was crazy, she knew that; she thought, I cannot let myself do this. I will simply have to take charge. I'll call him. This is the nineties, no matter how old we are.

"Simon, it's Lucretia. I just wanted to thank you for dinner. It was really terrific. I had a marvellous time, so lovely to see you, really. I wondered, could you come here for dinner, do you think? Maybe next Friday? Well, actually Saturday's fine. Even better. Great! See you then."

Rack of lamb? Steak *au poivre*? Or were those too show-offy, obvious? Maybe just cracked crab and a salad? But that showed off nothing at all, no cooking. And then she thought, Dear God, it doesn't matter. I'll make something good. Whatever.

But she spent the next week in elaborate fantasies of the possible evening with Simon. In which, sometimes, they went from passionate kissing at the door directly to bed, where things went well.

So obsessed was she that she wondered, Have I fallen in love with Simon? At my age? Is that what this is all about?

She noted that in her dreams several other men appeared, whom she had not thought of for years. She dreamed of Jim and of Tommy, of poor dead Jason, of beautiful Silvio. And of several others.

By the actual night on which the actual Simon came to her house for dinner, Lucretia was exhausted, emotionally, so drained that preparing the rack of lamb, God knows an easy dish, had taken great effort. Not to mention blow-drying her hair, brushing it.

It was partly from fatigue, then, that later, in her pretty living room, a familiar and perfect backdrop for love, Lucretia found herself regarding Simon with the most terrible sadness. She was not in love with Simon, she really was not—although he was perfectly nice and in his way quite handsome, still, and interesting. It was simply that he reminded her of love. Some hint of all the men she had ever loved was in his aura, like a scent. One sniff of it and she thought, Ah, love!

That knowledge, or insight, though sad, was relaxing to Lucretia, and she said, "I hope you won't mind if we eat unfashionably early? I'm sort of tired."

"Not at all. It's a terrible thing about age," he said, with his attractive, crooked smile. "I find that I'm tired a lot."

"Oh, I am, too!" and she flashed her answering bright smile, as she thought, Oh good, I won't have to pretend anymore. And I won't even think about falling in love.

But of course she did. ♦

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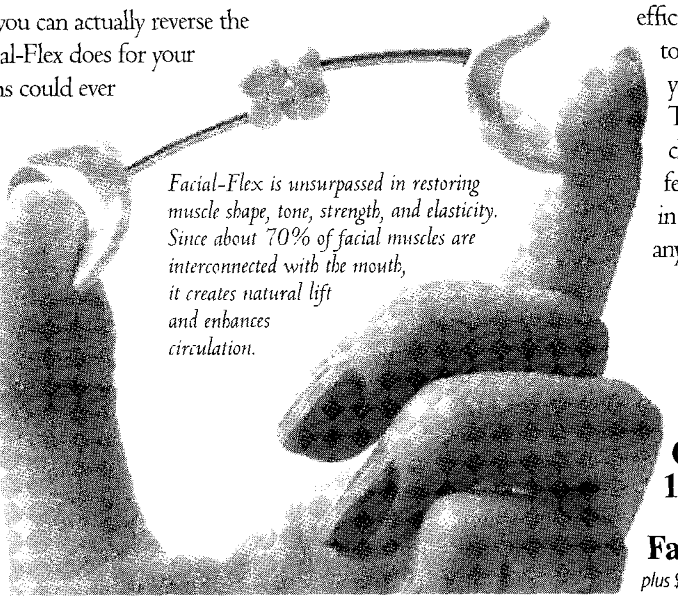

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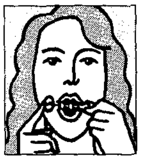

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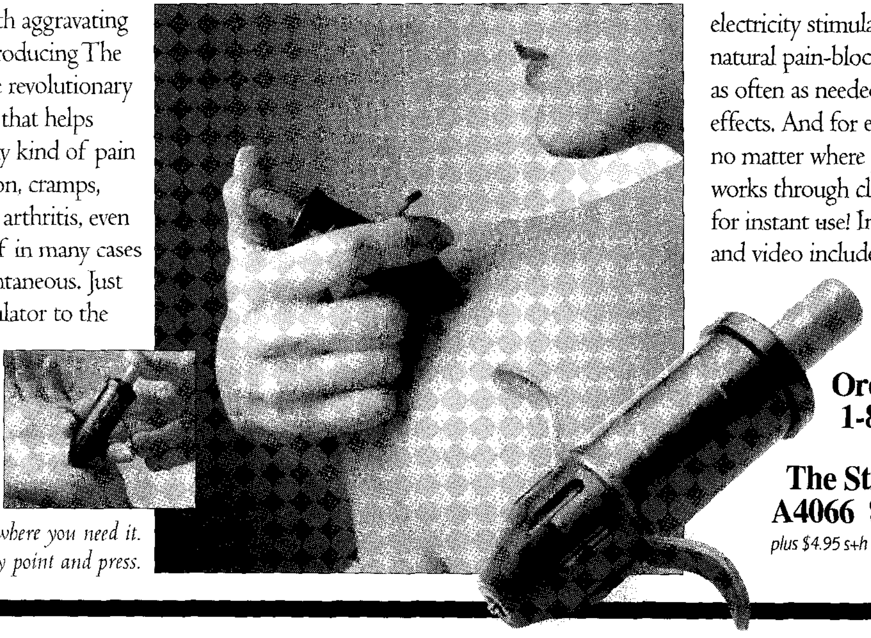

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## BOOKS

# A NOBEL FOR THE NORTH

*Negotiating between the urgency of witness and the urgency of delight.*

BY HELEN VENDLER

This year's Nobel Prize in Literature recognizes a lifetime of profound and beautiful writing by Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet whose pen has been the conscience of his country. Decades of unrelenting bloodletting forced a poet whose deepest impulse was celebration into an unsparing examination of violence—one conducted in prose as well as in the lyrics of "North" (1975) and subsequent volumes. Essays and lectures have served Heaney as vehicles for considering not only poetry but also political and ethical issues. Under the title "The Redress of Poetry" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $20) Heaney has now published his fourth book of prose. It contains ten lectures of the fifteen he delivered at Oxford during his tenure as Professor of Poetry (1989-94), and is as revealing a book as the three that preceded it—"Preoccupations" (1980), "The Place of Writing" (1989), and "The Government of the Tongue" (1989). Heaney's own struggle to articulate a comprehensive and responsible poetics propels all four books. In "The Redress of Poetry," a single internal quarrel—never resolved—is pursued in almost every lecture. It is the quarrel between the urgency of witness and the urgency of delight.

Heaney's early poetry was full of delight. The poems about his childhood on the family farm, in Ulster, represent him as a wide-eyed child, watching the golden bundles of thatch in the expert thatcher's hand, the sparks at the smith's anvil. He is a poet not so much of wild nature as of agriculturally tamed nature; the rituals of ordering and storing on a farm seem to have given him his first intimations of the beauties of arrangement and amassing which he later found in poetry. The early poetry is visual, aural, tactile, almost prelinguistic.

Even the fall into language—memorably told in the poem "Alphabets"—is a happy fall, expanding the small boy's world through exposure to Latin, Greek, and Irish, until the restricted precincts of the farm widen, finally, to the whole earth seen from space. The boy becomes the young teacher and (in other poems) the young husband, with a certain possessive joy felt in each state. There is, it is true, a consciousness in the youthful poet that Irish English and English English are not quite the same language, and that Irish farm life demands a poetic expression different from the treatment of English farm life seen in Wordsworth or Keats, but these are not disabling perceptions. He finds in Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" a poem intimately linked to his own vocabulary, but he also finds a comparable intimacy in the rural scenes of Thomas Hardy. Heaney's representation of ethnicity and minority status—consciously Irish, consciously of the North of Ireland, and consciously Catholic—was not yet exacerbated into the anguish it would later reflect. Heaney was free to work out, as a young man, his relationship to his English precursors (Wordsworth, Hopkins, Keats) as well as to his Irish and Scottish ones (Yeats, MacNeice, MacDiarmid).

Then came 1968. Heaney was a twenty-nine-year-old lecturer in English at Queen's University, Belfast. Violent clashes began between the police and Northern Irish Catholics demanding equal civil rights, and ended, in August, 1969, with the entrance into Derry of the British Army. Those events (and subsequent ones, heightening the violence) have marked Heaney's poetry ever since. In the essay "Feeling Into Words" (in "Preoccupations") Heaney singles out 1969 as a watershed:

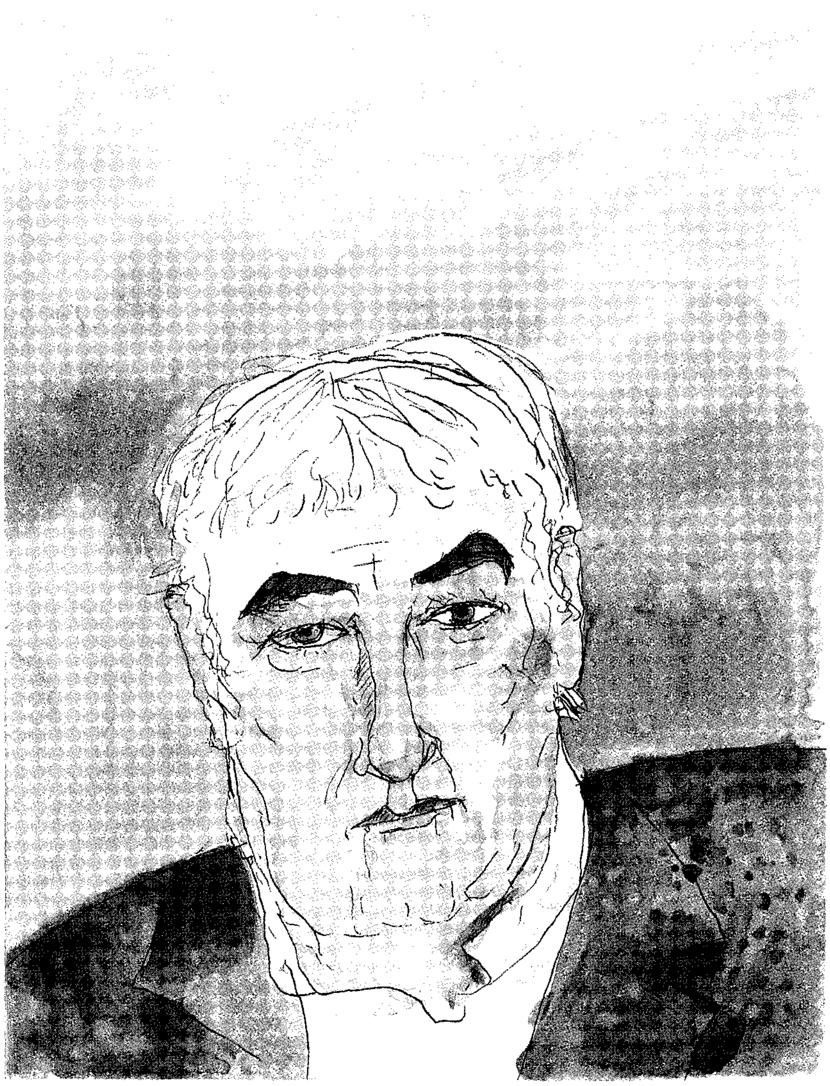
> From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament. . . . I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry . . . it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity.

This is an extraordinarily carefully worded statement. It has something for everyone. Poetry seeks the verbal icon (that is, a structural arrangement of words which cannot be other than it is). That is primarily an aesthetic demand. Poetry needs to find symbols adequate to predicaments—an ethical demand. Poetry needs to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason—a metaphysical demand. And, finally, poetry must recognize authentic human intensity wherever it occurs—a psychological demand. This is an almost inhumanly burdened poetics, far from the joyous poetics of the boy hiding in a tree and being the "lobe and larynx / of the mossy places." It is still this burdened poetics that is being examined, questioned, and extended in Heaney's Oxford lectures. His tenure at Oxford was completed before the present ceasefire in Northern Ireland, and the last lecture, "Frontiers of Writing," directly addresses the effect of political division on the poet and the responsibility that the poet must assume:

> Even though the subjects of the lectures have been for the most part poets from the English and American canons, the unspoken background has been a Northern Irish one. [The] poets from Northern Ireland . . . feel with special force a need to be true to the negative nature of the evidence and at the same time to show an affirming flame, the need to be both socially responsible and creatively free.

"Socially responsible and creatively free"—must a poet be both? Can a poet be both? If the poem you write seems socially responsible today, who is to say that tomorrow, when notions of social responsibility have changed, it will not seem socially reprehensible? If you are being (as you think) socially responsible, but your fellows call you a collaborationist or a trimmer, who is to judge between you and them? If, on the other hand, you are being (as you think) creatively free, but others say you are fiddling while Rome burns, who is in the right?

These problems pushed Heaney toward an intense scrutiny of Eastern European poetry. In 1974, he had written in an essay on Mandelstam that the Russian poet "served the people by serving their language," and he had added, "We live here in critical times ourselves, when the idea of poetry as an art is in danger of being overshadowed by a quest for poetry as a diagram of political attitudes." He returned to Mandelstam in "The Government of the Tongue," and added essays or parts of essays on Chekhov, Milosz, Holub, and Zbigniew Herbert. In each writer, he sought out the conditions of poetic freedom in authoritarian or totalitarian circumstances. The deftness and inventiveness with which Eastern European poets, feeling the state pressure for political correctness, managed to evade it was one focus of Heaney's inquiry; but an equal focus was their steadily maintained indifference to such pressure. Though Heaney moved, with his young family, to the Republic in 1972, his imagination has remained embroiled in events in the North of Ireland, and he has posed, in both specific and general ways, the question of the role of writing within a framework of human suffering.



ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

*The 1995 Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney: exploring the Northern Irish poets' need to be socially responsible and creatively free.*

HEANEY'S most arresting model for the role of writing was given in the title essay of "The Government of the Tongue." He borrowed the Gospel narrative of the woman taken in adultery, and he introduced the parallel between Jesus' writing and that of the poet by saying:

> In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil—no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed.
>
> I am thinking of Jesus' writing as it is recorded in Chapter Eight of John's Gospel.

In the narrative, Jesus twice stoops down and writes on the ground with his finger. In between, he has said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Gradually, the members of the crowd—"being convicted by their own conscience," Heaney writes—disappear. The Gospel does not record what Jesus wrote. Heaney comments:

> The drawing of those characters is like poetry, a break with the usual life but not an absconding from it. Poetry, like the writing, is arbitrary and marks time in every possible sense of that phrase. It does not say to the accusing crowd or to the helpless accused, "Now a solution will take place"; it does not propose to be instrumental or effective. Instead, in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves.

This is Heaney's most neutral—and, to my mind, most powerful—defense of poetry, precisely because it does not specify the content that poetry should present. It speaks simply to the arresting power of art. It doesn't matter (according to the Gospel) that we should know *what* Jesus writes. What matters is that he doesn't answer in the terms offered him by his enemies, who say of the woman taken in adultery, "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" The silent writing follows their question. The others continue asking him, and though Jesus does respond ("He that is without sin . . ."), he follows that answer again with the silent writing, giving the accusers time to reflect on their own moral position and to disperse.

However attractive the analogy, Jesus' writing does not obey an aesthetic imperative but simply an ethical one. The parallel does not offer scope for the joyous play—the stream of electric energy—released when a medium is brought into full force. In "The Redress of Poetry" Heaney wants now to speak

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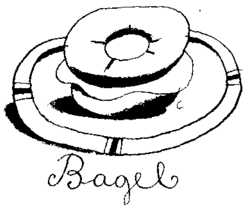
directly to the issue of aesthetic release and its relation to ethical concern. This impossible and necessary relation is one interrogated afresh by artists in each generation. Heaney's most general formulation in his new book says that "the poem . . . is a showing forth of the way that poetry brings human existence into a fuller life." Poetry is "an overbrimming, totally resourceful expressiveness" that "becomes suddenly available." The formulation suggests that the truest ethical concern for the writer must be the widening of consciousness, first on his own part and then perhaps on the part of his readers. How does poetic language widen consciousness in a way that we can claim as ethical?

HEANEY himself lays out the meaning of his title "The Redress of Poetry." As a noun, the word "redress" (in, say, the phrase "redress of grievances") means "reparation of, satisfaction or compensation for, a wrong sustained or the loss resulting from this." In this way, the word expresses an ethical anxiety that poetry be of use to "programmes of cultural and political realignment" which wish to restore an ethical just balance. But Heaney invokes as well two meanings of "redress" as a verb—both now obsolete. The first, "to set (a person or a thing) upright again," is used by Heaney to affirm poetry "as an upright, resistant, and self-bracing entity within the general flux and flex of language"; this definition stresses the poet's own internal ethical obligation to use language accurately and truthfully. "Redress" was also used as a hunting term, meaning "to bring back (the hounds or deer) to the proper course." And here Heaney warms to his defense of the uninhibited play of language:

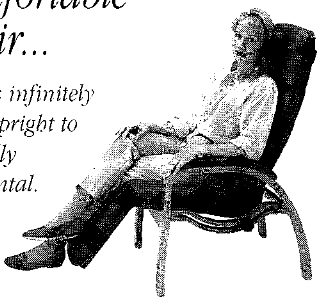


> I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability; I want to celebrate its given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision and animates our physical and intelligent being. . . . In this "redress" there is no hint of ethical obligation; if there is a control being obeyed, it is the control of the rules of a game, and the game entails finding a course for the breakaway of innate capacity, a course where something unhindered, yet directed, can sweep ahead into its full potential.

With these notions in mind, Heaney launches into lectures on George Herbert, Christopher Marlowe ("Hero and Leander"), Brian Merriman ("The Midnight Court"), John Clare, Oscar Wilde ("The Ballad of Reading Gaol"), Hugh MacDiarmid, Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop, and (in a provocative comparison) W. B. Yeats and Philip Larkin. He closes with a lecture affirming the triple nature of poetic redress and sketching a map of modern Northern Irish writing as it has been and as it might come to be.

In each of the lectures Heaney is working out his own relation to possible models. Herbert (the Protestant aristocrat, the Renaissance courtier) could not, in some sense, be further from the boy born to Catholic parents on an Ulster farm. In saluting the extraordinary human depth and linguistic originality of Herbert ("a grounded strength as well as a perfect tact"), Heaney counters the reductive (and ridiculous) notion that one can find ethical and aesthetic sustenance only in writers who resemble oneself in ethnicity and class. In his consideration of Bishop, too (whom he links with Herbert), Heaney praises the way in which "wit confronts hurt and holds a balance that deserves to be called wisdom." Heaney's implication is that hurt without wit can scarcely deserve the name of wisdom; hurt unmodulated by intelligent reflection and unshaped by linguistic control cannot achieve the force of poetry.

Over and over, in this book, the moves made in the Herbert essay are consolidated. Marlowe's maturity "is present not as moral *gravitas* but as a fully attained artistic mastery, the casual technical virtuosity of the poetry being the equivalent of a happy inner freedom in the poet." Against Sir Philip Sidney's emphasis on the connection of poetry and virtue, Heaney says that "no honest reader of poems, then or now, would see moral improvement or, for that matter, political education, as the end and purpose of his or her absorption in a poetic text." These are words righting a balance. In an age concerned more with elegance than truth, one



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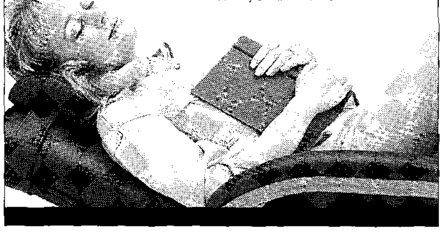

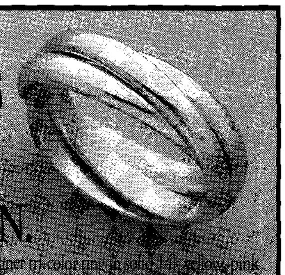

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might have to insist on the ethical force of poetry. But when the chief aspect of poetic utterance which is being appreciated is ethical intent—as in all the cant about "the personal is political" and "the poetry of witness"—the time requires Heaney's insistence on the irrepressibility of headlong imagination and spontaneous linguistic freedom which he finds not only in Marlowe but also in the comic energy of Merriman's carnivalesque eighteenth-century debate on sexual politics.

Heaney does not avoid the hard cases; indeed, sometimes they land him in a quandary. In a brilliant reading, he treats "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"—the "haunting, problematical" poem written by Oscar Wilde after his release from prison—as "an example of that most disaffected of Irish genres, the jail journal," pointing out that it was Wilde's prison number, Convict C.3.3., that appeared on the title page of the work when it was first published. Behind Heaney's lecture one can sense the internment without trial and the humiliating jail conditions endured by prisoners in Northern Ireland. He says:

> In Wilde's case, nothing was mitigated. He was issued with prison clothes. He ate porridge and bread and suet pudding in insufficient quantities. He slept on a plank bed. He walked the treadmill. He picked oakum. He had no writing materials, no books. He suffered from diarrhoea. He suffered from earache. Insomnia and hunger reduced him to a physical wreck. He wept easily and was for months in a state of nervous collapse, at the mercy of brutal warders who exercised their authority with petty ferocity.

While admitting that Wilde's true path toward human solidarity lay in the best reaches of his art—"the hard-edged, unpathetic prose" of "The Importance of Being Earnest"—Heaney says that he wanted to lecture on "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" because it represents "a kind of work not usually discussed within the academy." He writes:

> Its effects are probably deemed too broad, its popularity too misplaced, its status within Wilde's oeuvre too insecure to warrant serious consideration. And yet, for all that, the poem does give credence to the idea of poetry as a mode of redress. In it, Wilde the aesthete was stripped of his dandy's clothes to become Wilde the convict; the Dives of the coteries was compelled to know life as the Lazarus of the underworld.

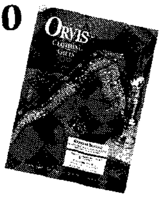
I myself am not certain that, where aesthetic practice is concerned, Dives knows more having become Lazarus. To my mind, Wilde knows *less* in "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" than he does in "The Importance of Being Earnest," precisely because the conditions of life (unpropitious) and the inflictions of genre (the melodramatic ballad) cloud his expressive capacities and mar the poem. Heaney admits the marring but not its epistemological corollary—that a writer knows less, not more, when he is deflected from his own best literary capacities by an unsuitable form of life and an uncongenial mode of art.

Heaney has no trouble criticizing the Communist absurdities of Hugh MacDiarmid, and does not think MacDiarmid's "doctrinal extremism" (which certainly sprang from Lazarus sympathies as well as from Scottish nationalism) a help to the poetry. Heaney can maintain a strictly aesthetic standard before MacDiarmid's verse (as he cannot, quite, before Wilde's), commenting that often, after a moment of aesthetic success, "the air fails or the water drains, a disastrous drop occurs in the vocal and metrical pressure; what was fluent becomes flaccid, what was detail becomes data."

Heaney's ethical demands on art also lead him to give Larkin less, I think, than his due. In comparing Yeats's "The Cold Heaven" with Larkin's "Aubade," he pits a greater poet against a lesser, and it is no surprise that Yeats comes off the winner; that is perhaps as it should be. However, Heaney's judgment seems to be made on extrapoetic terms. Though "Aubade," he says, is, in its artistic integrity, "on the side of life," he nonetheless mounts a final case against it:

> The poem does not hold the lyre up in the face of the gods of the underworld; it does not make the Orphic effort to haul life back up the slope against all the odds. For all its heartbreaking truths and beauties, "Aubade" reneges on what Yeats called "the spiritual intellect's great work."

These are harsh words. "It is essential," Heaney asserts, "that the vision of reality which poetry offers should be transformative, more than just a printout of the given circumstances of its time and place." Not everyone demands that poetry be transformative: I am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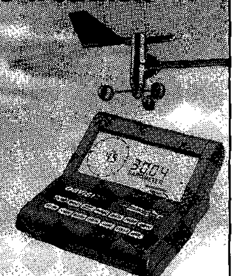
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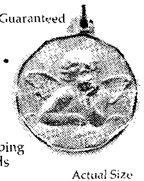
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continually grateful for poetry that passionately, accurately, and finely depicts the given circumstances of its time and place, and no more. I fly to Larkin's defense: to me he is not "debilitating" or "defeatist," as Heaney calls him, but entirely consoling in his truthtelling about the bleakness of circumstance. What is irremediable needs recognition, too. And no positive or heartening spin need be put on the irremediable in poetry.

In facing, and reproducing, his temperament, Larkin was performing one of the true tasks of poetry: to clone, in words, the uniqueness of a single person. We know Larkin through and through from his verse, and he speaks with a voice like no one else's. For me, that is enough; and for Heaney, too, it is unarguably a high achievement—if, perhaps, one he must withstand rather than capitulate to. The strong resistance of the working artist in Heaney to the seductions of Larkinian depression betrays an awareness of the threat that such depression poses to that obdurate social hope which Heaney refuses to relinquish.

HEANEY'S lectures offer the reader a brimming metaphoric energy, a fine-tuned analytic vocabulary, a buoyant vivacity of description, a reflective humor, an ethical awareness, a capaciousness of mind, and an imaginative penetration that are unequalled in contemporary critical prose. And it should be recalled that during the years of these Oxford lectures Heaney was also—and primarily—composing both the ethereal, elusive, and eloquent poems of transiency printed in "Seeing Things" (1991) and the autobiographical and mythological-political poems forthcoming in his new collection, "The Spirit Level." They flicker back and forth to each other, the prose and the poetry of the last six years, each a critique of the other, each an illumination of the other, and, as Heaney's accomplishment is reflected upon, they should be considered together, not apart. ♦

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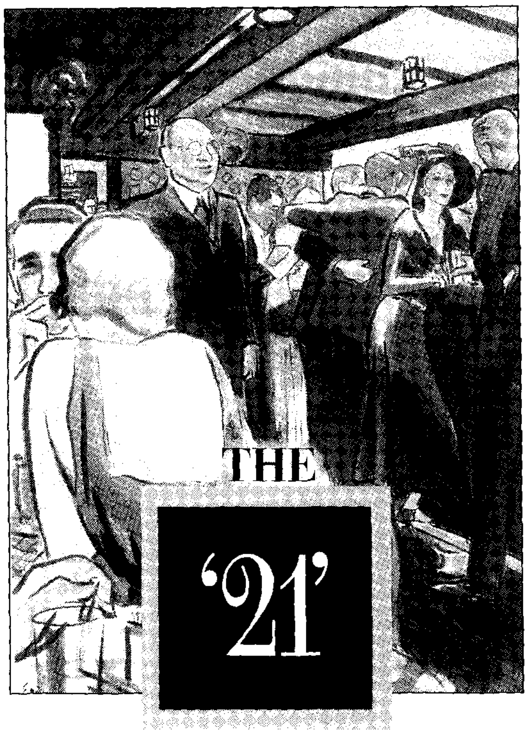

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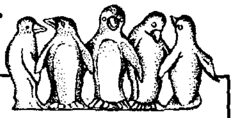

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*Kazuo Ishiguro battles the mores of an imaginary country.*

### BY FRANCIS WYNDHAM

Kazuo Ishiguro's latest novel, "The Unconsoled" (Knopf; $25), is cast in the form of an extended anxiety dream—or perhaps (as it's a long work) in successive episodes of a serial dream—and it gets nearer to re-creating the experience of an actual dream than any other novel I know. I read it in the course of several days, and caught myself on occasion confusing its contents with those of my own dreams during the intervening nights. Part of my disquiet may have been a fear that I would somehow fail in this review, because "The Unconsoled" is difficult to describe, let alone judge. But, of course, the anxiety with which Ishiguro is concerned is a profound, pervasive angst, not a reasonable worry that can be connected to a particular ephemeral cause.

As Ishiguro is one of my favorite contemporary writers, I was also worried that I might not like this novel, which was received by most English critics with dismay. They saw it as an aberration—a courageous but misguided departure from the delicately delineated landscape so imaginatively established in Ishiguro's three previous books into a featureless no man's land, where readers could easily lose their way. There was even an implication that Ishiguro, as though embarrassed by the middlebrow accolades accorded "The Remains of the Day" (the Booker Prize and a Merchant-Ivory movie), had self-consciously opted for pretentious experiment; he was quite original enough while still remaining accessible, so why the change?

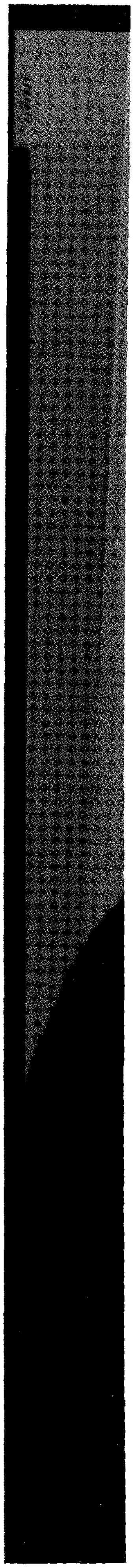
It is true that "The Unconsoled" is longer and more repetitious than its predecessors, but it does not strike me as essentially different from them. Ishiguro has never been a strict realist as a writer, and here, by subjecting his narrative technique to the laws that seem to govern our sleeping life, he more nearly approaches the surreal—and in this surrealist vein he is often extremely funny, always in his own manner but with echoes of Lewis Carroll and Luis Buñuel. The novel is a powerful (if not entirely successful) variation on the themes of bewilderment, shame, and regret which he has previously and more gently presented as dominant strands throughout human existence. To use a modish phrase that Ishiguro himself would never use, the people he writes about are all "in denial."

There has always been something dreamlike about Ishiguro's fiction. Both "A Pale View of Hills" and "An Artist of the Floating World" are set in Japan: in the first, the narrator is a Japanese woman in England thinking back over several decades to Nagasaki shortly after the war; in the second, the narrator is a once-celebrated Japanese painter in 1948 reliving his compromised prewar past. Ishiguro's family left Japan for England in 1960, when he was five, so it is not surprising that the physical background of these books, though it never seems false, is suggested in generalized, almost abstract terms, as though viewed from a distance—an effect admirably suited to the context.

The same is true of the impression of life in a grand English house between the wars, as remembered by Stevens, the dedicated butler in "The Remains of the Day," who is visited in old age by misgivings about the values of the system he has so devotedly served. Some English readers have enjoyed complaining that Stevens "isn't a bit like a butler"—implying complacently that they have known many and, crassly, that they are all alike. But the quality of that novel is not based on the accuracy of its social observation. This became apparent in the film version, which took enormous pains over the

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

*Kazuo Ishiguro, London, March 21, 1995.*



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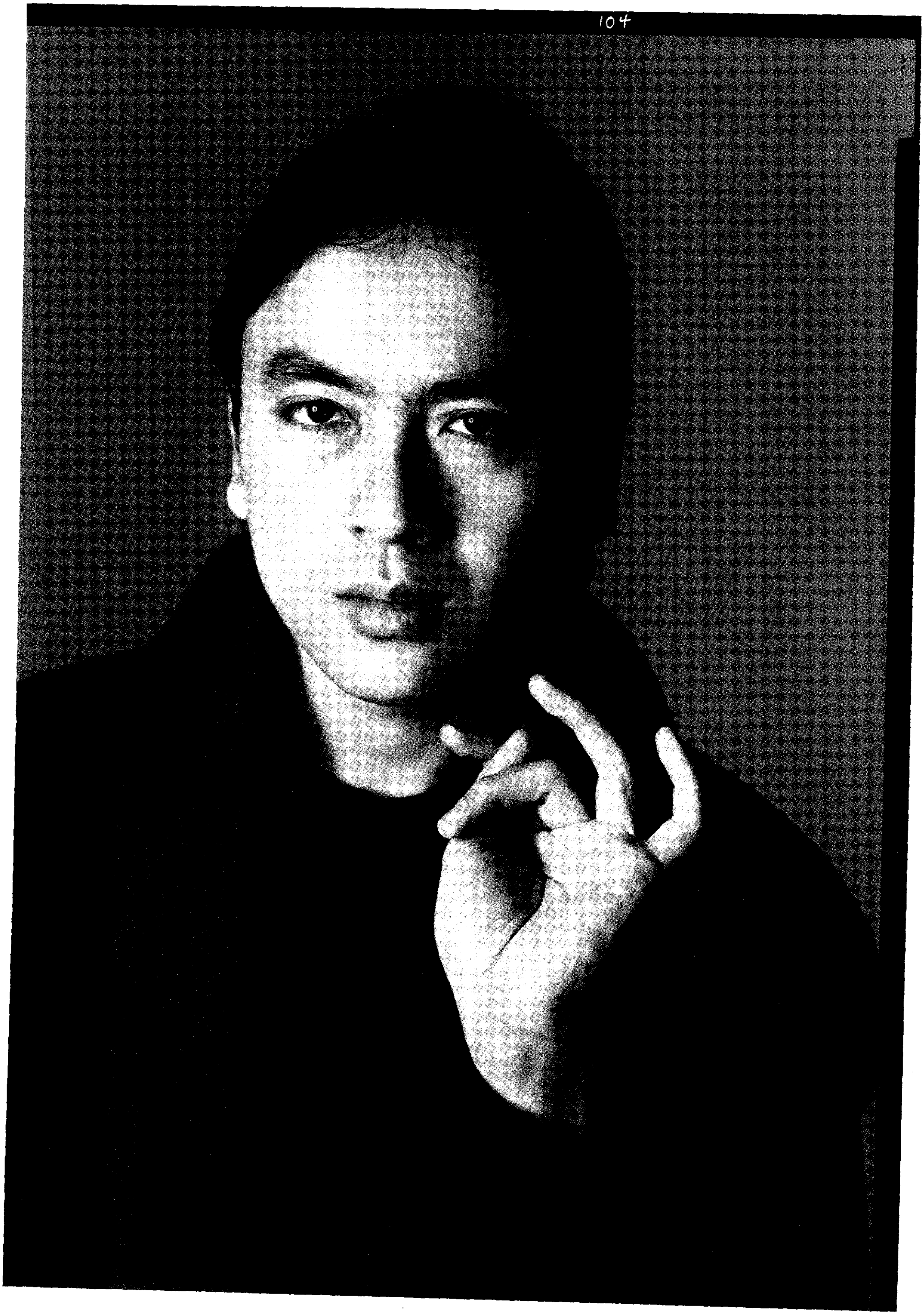

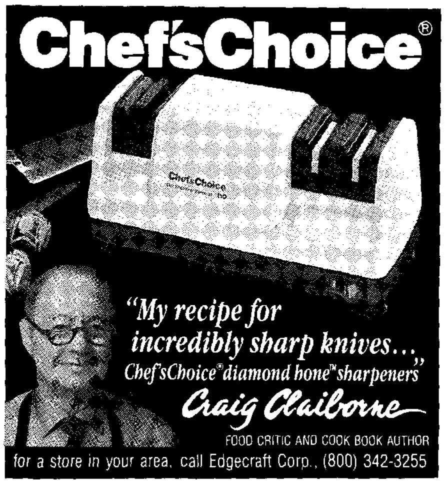
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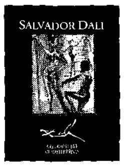
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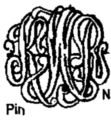
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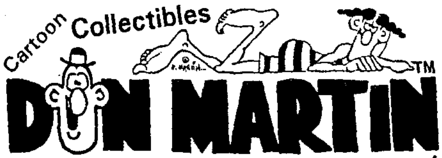
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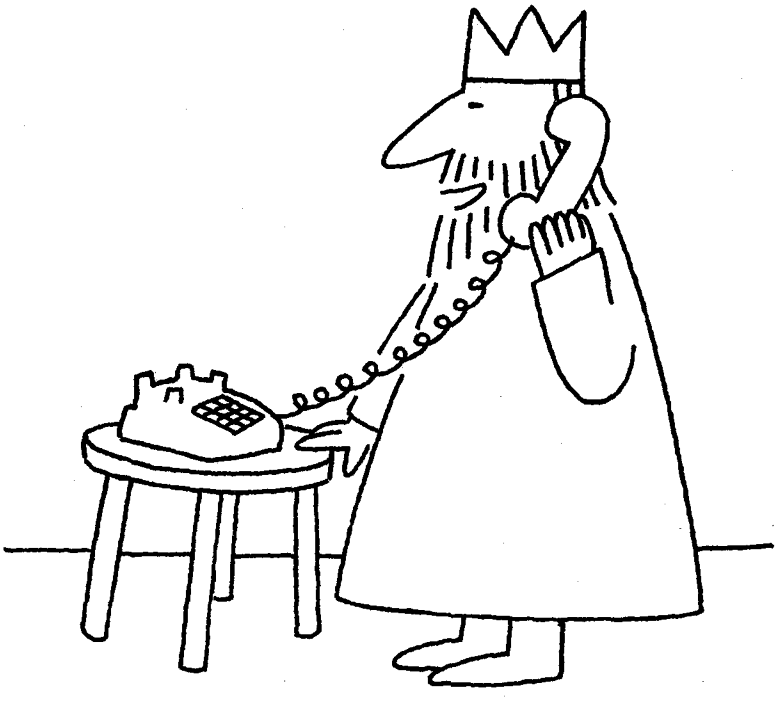
literal re-creation of period minutiae, with the result that the elusive poetry of the book evaporated and the subtle emotional drama was coarsened. An overdose of detail can easily stifle a work of art.

THERE is no danger of that fate for "The Unconsoled," since in its murky atmosphere of muddle detail cannot flourish. Unlike many dream books, it does not open with the narrator dozing off; rather, the dreamer (a famous pianist named Ryder) seems to wake up with a start in the first sentence, to find himself arriving at a hotel in a strange town. He is vaguely aware of various obligations he has to fulfill there, among them giving a concert for which he is insufficiently prepared, but he seems to have forgotten most of his past. This is not a case of sudden amnesia. His state of mind is nearer to what one imagines creeping senile dementia must be like, and this cloud of uncertain memory, punctuated by black holes of sheer oblivion, is forcefully conveyed, with a sense of familiarity surprising to find in an author still young.

Ryder is ushered into the hotel lift by Gustav, an elderly porter, who begins to speak during their ascent and goes on and on and on, long after even the slowest lift would have arrived at even the highest floor. At this point, Ishiguro's readers tumble to the fact that the story they are being told does not take place in actual time. A page or so later, it shifts yet further away from narrative convention: the consciousness of Ryder, who continues to use the first person, seems to have also at one time inhabited the porter, about whose past circumstances Ryder knows things that he has not been told. Something like this can happen in our dreams when they take the form not of memories or predictions but of stories made up as we go along. Asleep, we all become novelists.

The anonymous town, in which Ryder spends four driven days, is presumably European and perhaps a little old-fashioned—a notional city, its origins more literary than geographical or historical. The municipal buildings, parks, and cafés, the suburban housing projects, and the surrounding countryside are minimally described but seem no less true for this lack of specification: in their conformity to symbolic fundamentals they are subliminally recognizable. In "The Remains of the



"Corrupted absolutely—and you?"

Day" Ishiguro could make a simple bus stop or seaside pier seem vividly "there" by way of the fraught human feelings it had witnessed. This expressionist trick cannot be performed in "The Unconsoled," because Ryder's sensations are partly anesthetized. People and places mysteriously duplicate themselves or transmute into each other without causing him more than faint surprise: Gustav's daughter may be the wife whom Ryder abandoned; a ticket inspector on a train is a childhood girlfriend.

Ishiguro's readers have also previously met some of the people Ryder encounters, if in slightly different forms. Gustav's grandson, Boris, who is one of Ishiguro's most poignantly real creations, is a reincarnation of Ichiro, the little boy in "An Artist of the Floating World," just as Ichiro's grandfather Masuji Ono—the painter-narrator—was himself an amplification of the grandfather who figured less prominently in "A Pale View of Hills." Gustav, in his fervent respect for the high vocation of hotel portering, closely resembles Stevens the butler, with his touching belief in the dignity of domestic service. (Ishiguro has said in interviews that, when he left Japan, as a child, he did so without bidding goodbye to his grandparents—and that this omission has saddened him ever since. In "The Unconsoled," where human relationships tend to be tentative or arbitrary, the one between grandfather Gustav and grandson Boris stands out as deep and comparatively constant.)

The book does have one serious flaw—so obvious a flaw that I hesitate to refer to it, suspecting some kind of critical booby trap. I have said that "The Unconsoled" is long and repetitious, but these are not flaws in themselves: the basic conception of the book, the circular design like an obstacle race run in relays, the prolonged emphasis on enterprise eternally sidetracked or bogged down, the paranoid sense of panic at unremitting interruption and misdirection, all need length and repetition to realize their cumulative effect. The trouble is that it is sometimes long-winded—most noticeably in the reported speech of the par-

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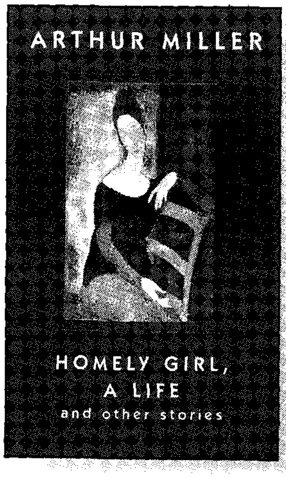

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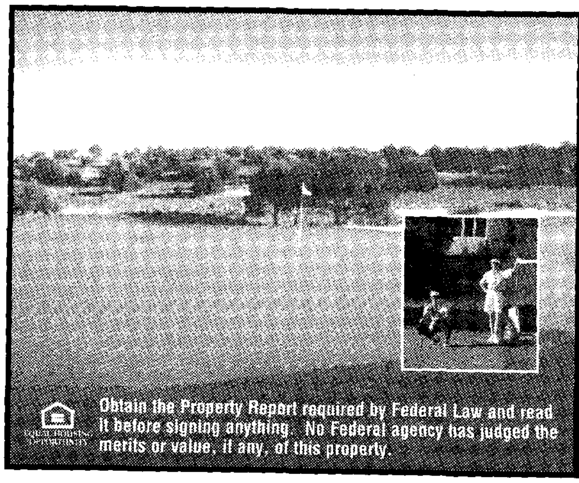

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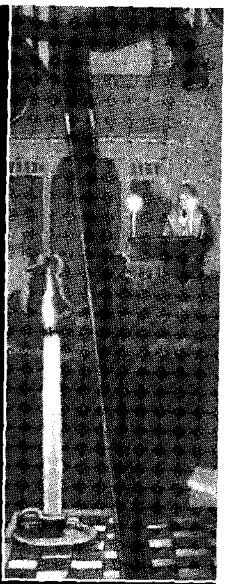

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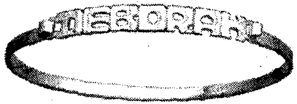

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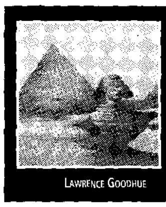

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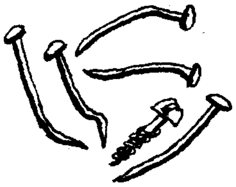
LAWRENCE GOODHUE

ticipants when each in turn is allotted an extensive set piece as artificial as an operatic aria. While they unstoppably plod through their voluble monologues, using the same phrases again and again, correcting and contradicting themselves, fussing over the exact expression of this or that banality, the anxiety dream turns into an even grimmer nightmare, from which the reader may be tempted to escape by skipping. Often, in reading novels, one looks forward to the passages of dialogue for diversion and a slight relief from concentration; this time, one comes to dread the sight of quotation marks, and the paragraphs of straight narration, however dense, beckon like oases.

I think I can see what Ishiguro intends by this risky technique. It is a challenge and a tease. Just as the reader is innocently expecting some development in one narrative thread—even if only a fresh example of frustrated endeavor—a separate, new character blocks Ryder's path and embarks on yet another confessional discourse with a relentless garrulity that is simultaneously exasperating and soporific, like poor Ryder's parallel experience throughout the book: we may dutifully persist, in order to empathize more closely with the protagonist's ordeal, or we may decide to stop reading the book altogether. Alternatively, the literal transcription of the characters' wan wordiness may be meant to illustrate a sense they have of their own insubstantiality, as if a drift of insipid verbiage might conceal an abyss they refuse to recognize. But as the device unnecessarily increases the book's physical size it also constricts its artistic range, putting a bridle of deliberate boredom on the exercise of Ishiguro's daring and fastidious imagination.

He takes other risks, withholding from his readers such inducements to attention as a shapely plot, complex characterization, vivid descriptions, an arresting style with fancy metaphors. The novel is nevertheless a work of great interest and originality. Ishiguro has cited Kafka, Beckett, and Dostoyevski as favorite authors and possible influences: any resemblances to the first two are superficial, and, as far as I can see, there are none at all to the third. The humorous possibilities in oneiric incongruity have, of course, often been exploited before, but only one incident of many in "The Unconsoled"—when Ryder addresses a formal function in his dressing gown—comes anywhere near to being a cliché. The ludicrous confidence with which his characters are stubbornly certain of or passionately involved in facts and causes that seem too shaky or trivial to justify such faith might be thought to derive from the "Alice" books, and I was twice reminded of films by Buñuel. Ryder is continually committing himself to some course of action that he is never quite able to carry out, and the numerous examples of pressing social engagements stoically pursued but never fulfilled recall the dinner never eaten in "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie"; an unsettling scene in which people persistently discuss Ryder in his presence as though he were invisible echoes an episode in "The Phantom of Liberty." But Ishiguro has mapped out an aesthetic territory that is all his own.

It is a place of chill beauty, rendered in rather prosaic terms but instinct with mystery. Its inhabitants seem subtly deprived: either they have lost something or something has never been granted them. The note of plangent wistfulness found in Ishiguro's earlier books has been replaced by a frankly fantastic approach and a mood that is fiercer and funnier than before—if, on the whole, less intensely realized. But there is still plenty of room for future explorations by Ishiguro, whether in his former mode of traditional craftsmanship or through further flirtations with postmodern playfulness. "The Unconsoled" is not easy to read, but, surprisingly, its overall effect does contain an element of consolation. The muddle, panic, embarrassment, and dread that surface in our secret dreams do also, needless to say, feature in our daytime lives, and it is some comfort to be reminded by Ishiguro that they are universal. ♦



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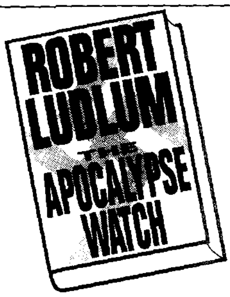

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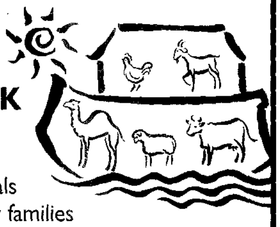

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by Gitta Sereny
(Knopf; $35)

Speer, who died in 1981, wrote three books recalling his life as Hitler's friend, architect, and Minister for Armaments and War Production, and his postwar imprisonment; those books, in turn, became the subject of other people's books and essays. Sereny's work is the most impressive so far. She is a multilingual journalist who interviewed not only Speer himself but his family, colleagues, and acquaintances—men and women who knew him before, during, and after his heady days as a favorite at Hitler's court. Her fascinating account brings into vivid focus Hitler and his circle—a bizarre rather than banal little world, stodgy in mores and manic in aspiration, marked by petty formality, gemütlichkeit, and baffling insensitivity.

## Christina Rossetti: A Writer's Life

by Jan Marsh
(Viking; $29.95)

This is an arresting portrait—of both the poet (the author of "Goblin Market" and a sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti) as a caged bird who, through her often astonishing verse, continues to sing and the Victorian milieu, by turns fevered and clammy, in which she wrote and lived. Best here is the sly, mordant Rossetti of her later years, whom we find exclaiming, in a letter about her illustrious kin, "Oh, my dear friend, don't let us wish for any more geniuses!"

## You Don't Miss Your Water

by Cornelius Eady
(Holt; $12)

Two dramas press behind the seemingly easy flow of this poetic cycle on the death of a stingy and bullying father. One concerns the son's rage, vented as he catalogues his father's injustices; the other is more artistic, showing how the poet's attentive deathwatch resists the impulse to simplify and erase. Eady's poems record death's strange, unprecedented intimacies, and even take some imaginative pleasure in the body's decay: "This is all I'll know of his body, the sharp ridge of spine, the bedsores, the ribs rising up in place like new islands. . . . *He is slipping to dust*, my hands inform me, *you'd better remember this*."

## Sensual Math

by Alice Fulton
(Norton; $17.95)

Alice Fulton has always written exuberantly, and in these poems her opulent diction and syncopated syntax dazzle again. In two dramatic sequences—one is in the voice of an advertising executive; the other reimagines the myth of Daphne and Apollo—the writing is electrifying, and a group of lyric elegies, tempered by a mature sadness new to Fulton's work, proves deeply moving.

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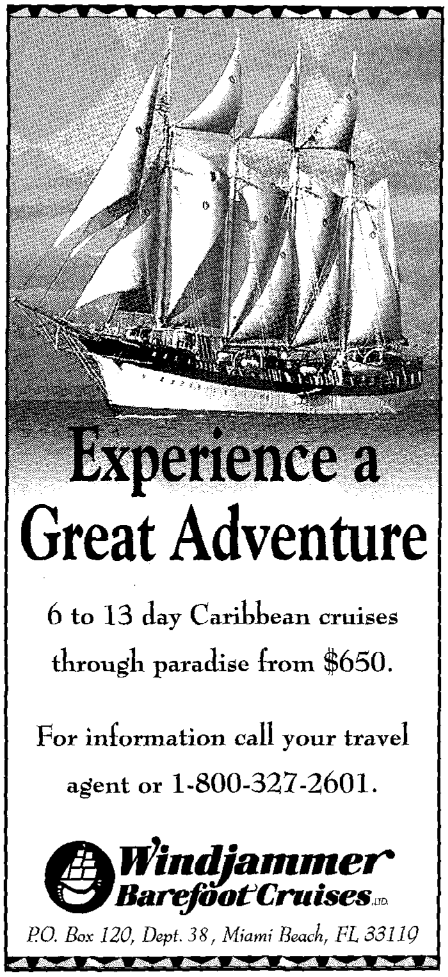

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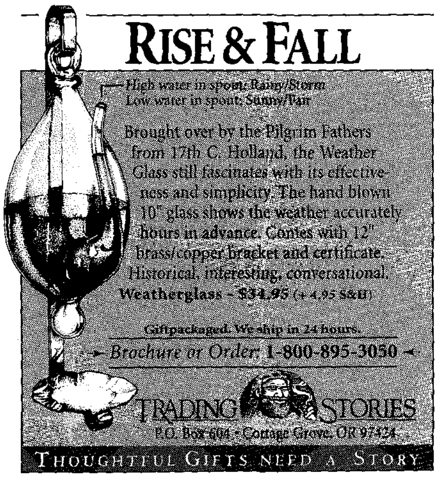

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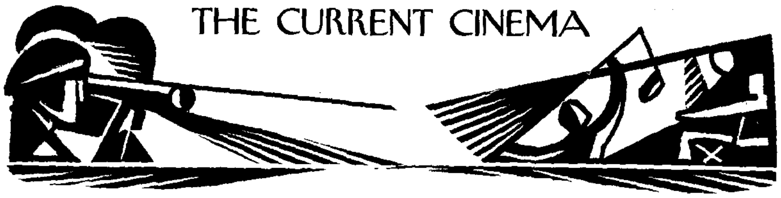


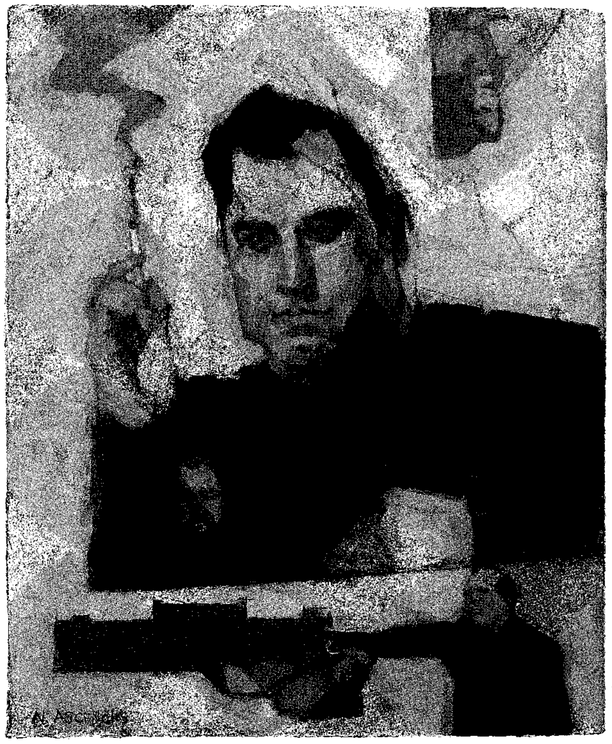
## THE CURRENT CINEMA

# PLAYERS

*An Elmore Leonard satire on Hollywood, and a Brooklyn miscellany.*

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

IN Barry Sonnenfeld's "Get Shorty," John Travolta plays Chili Palmer, a small-time Miami loan shark who sets out for Las Vegas in pursuit of a wayward debtor but winds up in Hollywood, where he discovers his true métier and fulfills his destiny: he becomes a movie producer. In a sense, Chili's story is a classic fable of show-biz success: a chance meeting leads to a glorious opportunity—a shot at the big time—and the hero, fuelled by dreams and I-gotta-be-me determination, rises to the occasion. In other ways, of course, this character doesn't quite fit the formula. Chili's new career path begins with a rather sinister piece of business. One of the deadbeats that Chili has to lean on is an anxious middle-aged man named Harry Zimm (Gene Hackman), who produces quickie horror films, and the loan shark, a lifelong movie fan, is delighted to make his acquaintance; when Chili has finished delivering his threats, he decides to seize the moment and pitch a story idea. Zimm is interested, and before long the shylock (as Chili calls himself) is attending meetings as Zimm's "associate" and picking up, with startling ease, the rules of Hollywood's power game. At that point, the story's satiric point seems obvious: Chili, who takes to this treacherous world like a duck to water, appears to embody the idea that being a low-level thug is a perfectly appropriate way to prepare for a career as a movie producer. The hero of "Get Shorty" is a sharp dresser and an artful intimidator—a born player.



*A cool breeze in a climate of hot air: John Travolta as Chili Palmer in "Get Shorty."*

This shady character's aptitude for Hollywood gamesmanship is a passable joke, but it's not rich enough to satisfy the veteran thriller writer Elmore Leonard, who wrote the novel that Scott Frank's screenplay is based on. (Until near the end, the script is extremely faithful to the source, preserving Leonard's corkscrew plotting and lifting a fair amount of wildly off-kilter dialogue straight from the book.) The joke that really tickles Leonard is the possibility that a guy like Chili might not simply hold his own among the sleek, predatory Hollywood types but even outclass them. It isn't surprising that this loan shark, who acquired his

N. ASCENCIOS

professional skills on the fringes of the Mob in Brooklyn, knows how to get his way in a ruthlessly competitive environment. What's shocking is how serene and good-tempered he is, even in the most trying situations (and this story provides many). His unflappability gives him a mysterious kind of grace, which sets him apart from brutal wiseguys like his Miami boss, Ray Barboni (Dennis Farina), and from vain, pampered Tinseltown luminaries like the temperamental star Martin Weir (Danny DeVito). At first, you think that the secret of Chili's success is that he can't be impressed: he isn't dazzled by wealth or power, and threats of grievous bodily harm don't faze him much. (He doesn't consider himself invulnerable; it's just that in his experience most people aren't intelligent enough to hurt him.) But after a while you begin to realize that his real distinction is that he doesn't waste energy being impressed with *himself;* virtually alone among the characters in "Get Shorty," Chili Palmer understands exactly who he is.

That's Elmore Leonard's kind of hero. In most Leonard stories, clever nobodies go up against apparently invincible somebodies and manage to beat them at their own game. The sweet message of his tough-talking thrillers is that the little guy isn't necessarily a loser. Because ordinary folks can't afford to surround themselves with high walls and hired muscle, they have to keep their wits about them in order to survive in the world; by contrast, most of the big-time operators who bedevil the hero of "Get Shorty" look like former hard cases made soft by success. Besides, the minds of the powerful are usually clouded by self-aggrandizing fantasies, and in Leonard's world that's a fatal weakness, like a glass jaw—something that a savvy fighter like Chili can exploit. The fun of "Get Shorty" lies in watching its unpretentious, undeluded hero defeat his enemies by manipulating their images of themselves. They all think they're smarter than he is, and he lets them; once he has them fully inflated with self-love, he sticks a pin in the balloon, and they're history. Travolta wafts through the movie like a cool breeze in a climate of hot air. This is a beautiful role for him. Miraculously, he hasn't lost the youthful bounce that electrified viewers in the opening scene of "Saturday Night Fever," almost twenty years ago. After a decade or so of trudging dutifully through awful movies, he has recovered the spring in his step; he's even more assured than he was in his career-resuscitating role in "Pulp Fiction." Travolta's strut is a joy to witness, because there's no macho arrogance in it; it expresses, rather, a simple, deep pleasure in movement itself, and a boyish eagerness to get where he's going so he can make something happen there.

Travolta incarnates everything that this movie should be about: his Chili Palmer is a survivor who hasn't become jaded by experience—who has hung on to his capacity to be amused by human folly, even at its most vicious. His no-sweat attitude deftly captures the dry comic tone of Elmore Leonard's prose, and that's a blessing, because the movie is directed by someone whose style is spectacularly ill-suited to the material. Sonnenfeld, who directed the very broad "Addams Family" comedies, doesn't have the dexterity to trap the tiny, quick ironies that Leonard specializes in—the gags that are meant to skitter past us and vanish before we've had time to get a good look at them. This filmmaker's approach is blunt, and futile. "Get Shorty" has a garish, cartoony visual style, which, more often than not, ruins the humor. The novel's delirious plotting never seems contrived, because Leonard's wily storytelling disguises itself as casual riffing, like an expertly constructed standup routine in which the punch lines don't feel like punch lines but instead sound as if they had bubbled up spontaneously out of the flow of everyday conversation. Sonnenfeld works too strenuously for laughs: he goes for huge sight gags and knock-'em-dead verbal zingers, and when all else fails he gooses the action with peppy, self-consciously silly music. He never, ever relaxes, and, as Leonard and Travolta demonstrate so convincingly, tense guys finish last.

In fairness to Barry Sonnenfeld, it's worth noting that the unique charm of Leonard's novels—which seem ready-made for the movies—has consistently eluded major-studio filmmakers. Burt Reynolds's "Stick" (1985) and John Frankenheimer's "52 Pick-Up" (1986) are both pretty bad, and neither of them has the partial saving grace of a perfor-

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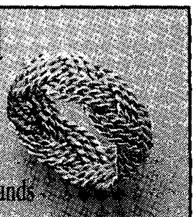

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mance like Travolta's. In a way, "Get Shorty" is instructive. Leonard's clear-eyed take on the ego-engorged culture of Hollywood is that the big-timers who run the studios, make the deals, and star in the overbudgeted pictures all have too much to lose—both in hard currency and in fragile, precious self-esteem—to be able to concentrate on the exacting small-scale work of telling shapely and surprising stories. They can't resist the temptation to overpower us, to kill us with excitement—even, it seems, when they're trying to dramatize a tale whose unmistakable moral is that sly, subtle tactics are far more effective than brute force. The filmmakers, like all the heavy hitters in "Get Shorty," come to a bad end. The movie shoots itself in the foot, and Travolta, who knows a few things about staying alive, ends up dancing on its grave.

MOST major-studio movies, in fact, are guilty of overselling what should be modest pleasures. And viewers who are weary of having their backs slapped and their lapels grabbed by loud, sweaty Hollywood pictures sometimes turn to cheap independent films for relief. There's something winning—initially—about the low-pressure approach of Wayne Wang and Paul Auster's "Blue in the Face," which presents itself as a loosely organized sketchbook of neighborhood life in Brooklyn. Many of the movie's scenes were shot in a few days after the filming of "Smoke," which was written by Auster and directed by Wang. (That picture opened in June, and is still running.) The filmmakers persuaded one of the stars of "Smoke"—Harvey Keitel—and several of its supporting actors to stick around and play some improvised skits in and just outside the smoke shop that was the earlier film's primary setting. The returning actors stay in their "Smoke" characters, and new performers—among them Michael J. Fox, Lily Tomlin, Jim Jarmusch, Roseanne, Madonna, and Mira Sorvino—drop by for a scene or two apiece. Each of these vignettes was shot quickly, guerrilla-theatre style: a long take with a single, static camera setup. As is often the case with improvisational comedy, the participants appear to be enjoying themselves enormously. Wang and Auster, who cooked up the whimsical ideas for the skits, seem to have encouraged the actors to be ragged and goofy and garrulous. The cast members gab ceaselessly, and a few of them even manage to shape their rants and musings into entertaining nonsense: Tomlin, as a man who desperately wants a Belgian waffle, gets laughs out of an awfully thin premise; Jarmusch, as a guy smoking his final cigarette before quitting, does a hilariously wistful routine on the joys of lighting up. Lou Reed, speaking directly into the camera about whatever pops into his head, steals the picture: playing himself, he's the coolest, funniest character on the screen.

It's obvious, though, that many of the improvisations didn't work out and the filmmakers found themselves with a lot of holes to patch in the editing room. "Blue in the Face" pads up its eighty-eight-minute running time with person-on-the-street interview footage (some shot on video), little documentary essays on Brooklyn lore (the desertion of the Dodgers, for instance), and a musical number or two—oddball stuff that Wang and Auster combine with the salvageable fragments of improvisation in a deliberately messy, random-seeming assemblage. The movie has a funky, amiable personality, which is at least an improvement on the overdeliberate manner of "Smoke." Finally, though, the filmmakers get carried away with themselves and squander the audience's good will. As the picture goes along, you may feel, to your surprise, a bit of familiar sales resistance creeping into your reactions; it's almost as if you were being badgered, in the usual way, by a conventional Hollywood movie. At a certain point, you realize, with dismay, that the movie's easygoing vulgarity is supposed to represent Brooklyn itself, in all its democratic, multiethnic, abrasive, pragmatic, unpredictable glory. But Brooklyn's virtues are of a kind that is dangerous to name and celebrate; to weave them, as "Blue in the Face" does, into a religious tapestry is to violate their down-to-earth nature. The movie draws us in with its nonchalance and arbitrariness, but it can't stop reminding us how wonderfully eccentric it is. The pointlessness of "Blue in the Face" would be vastly more appealing if Wang and Auster didn't make such a point of it. Brooklyn may be full of talkers, but the smart ones know when to shut up. ♦

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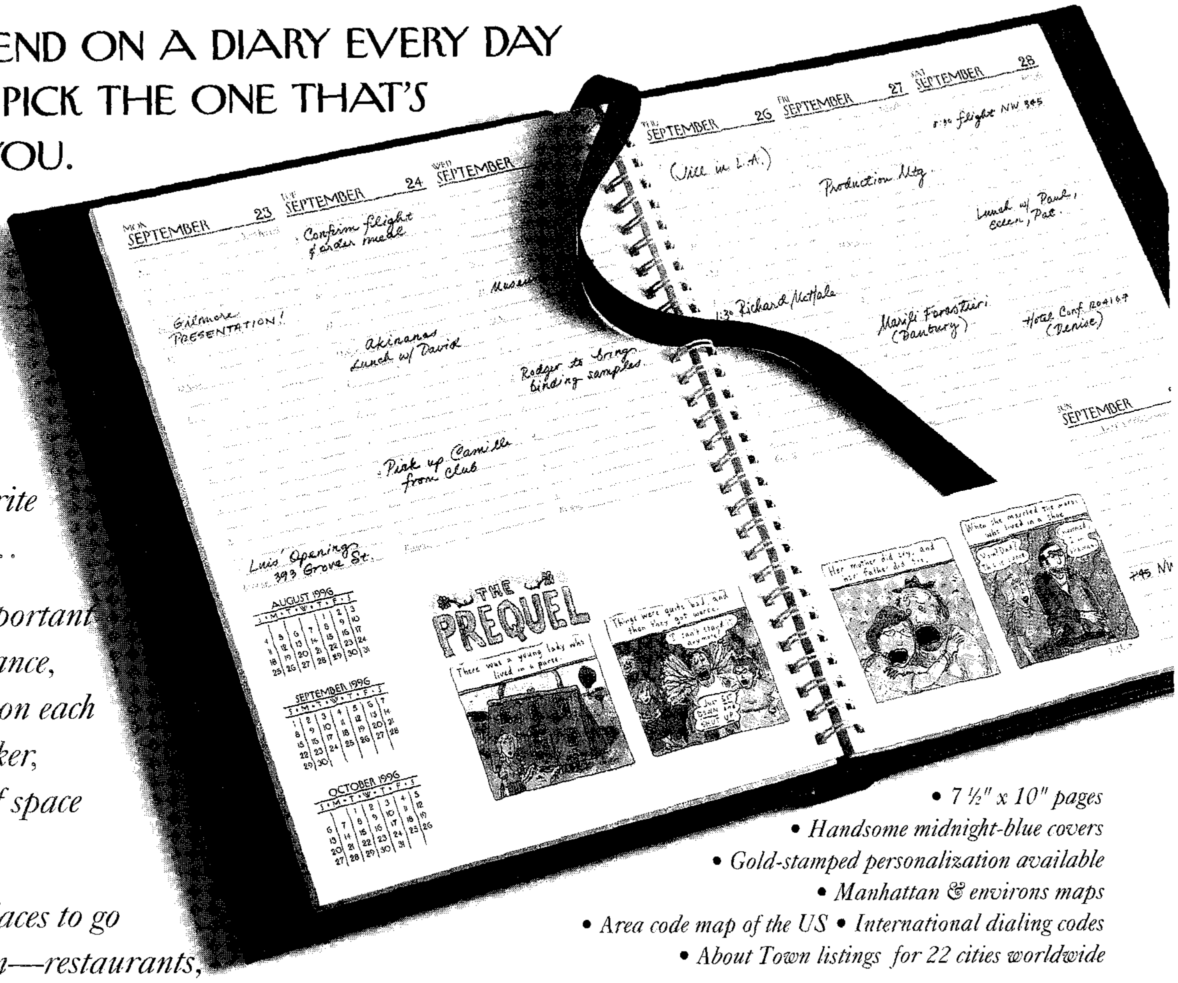

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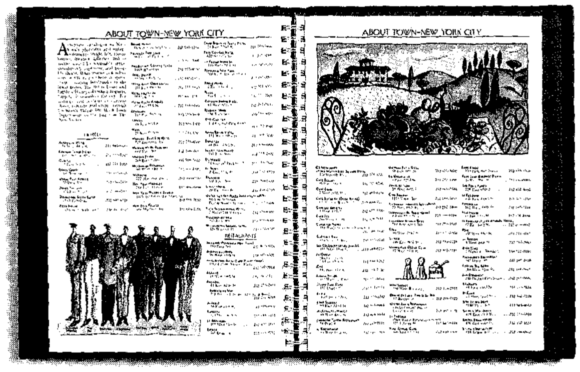

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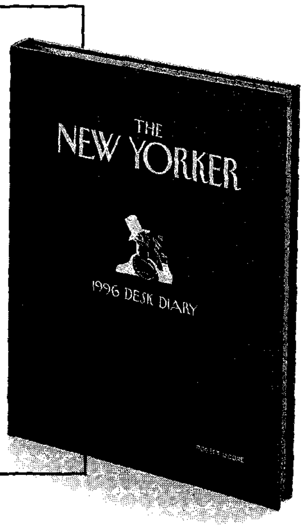

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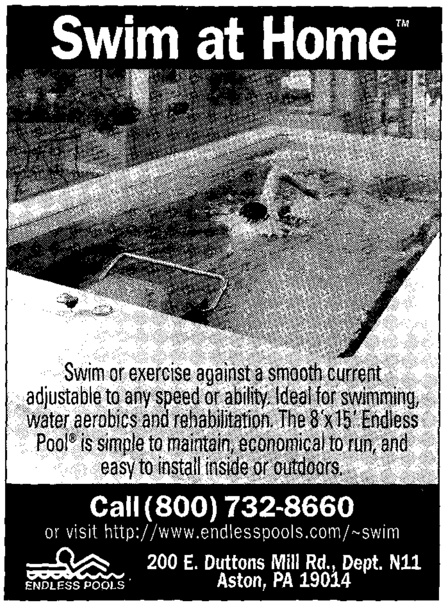
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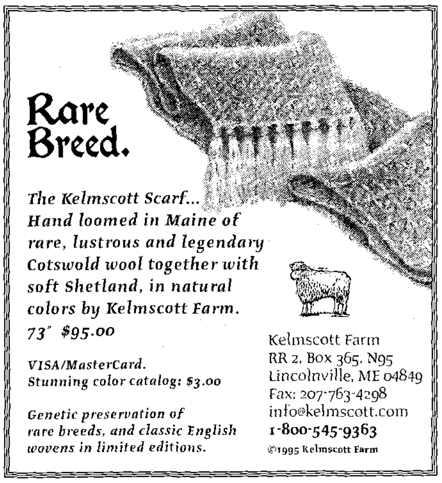
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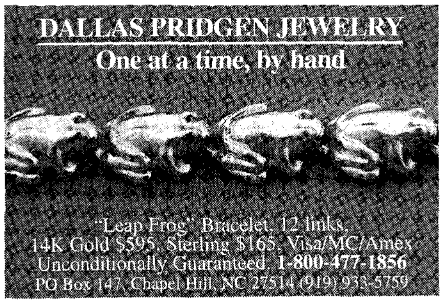
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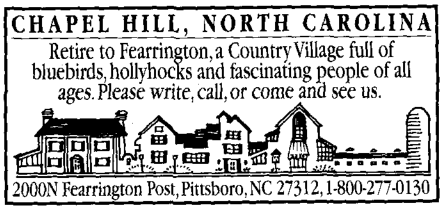
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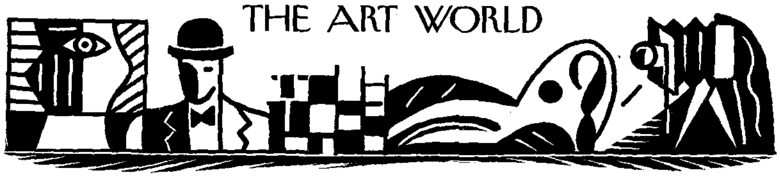


# FLIGHT ITSELF

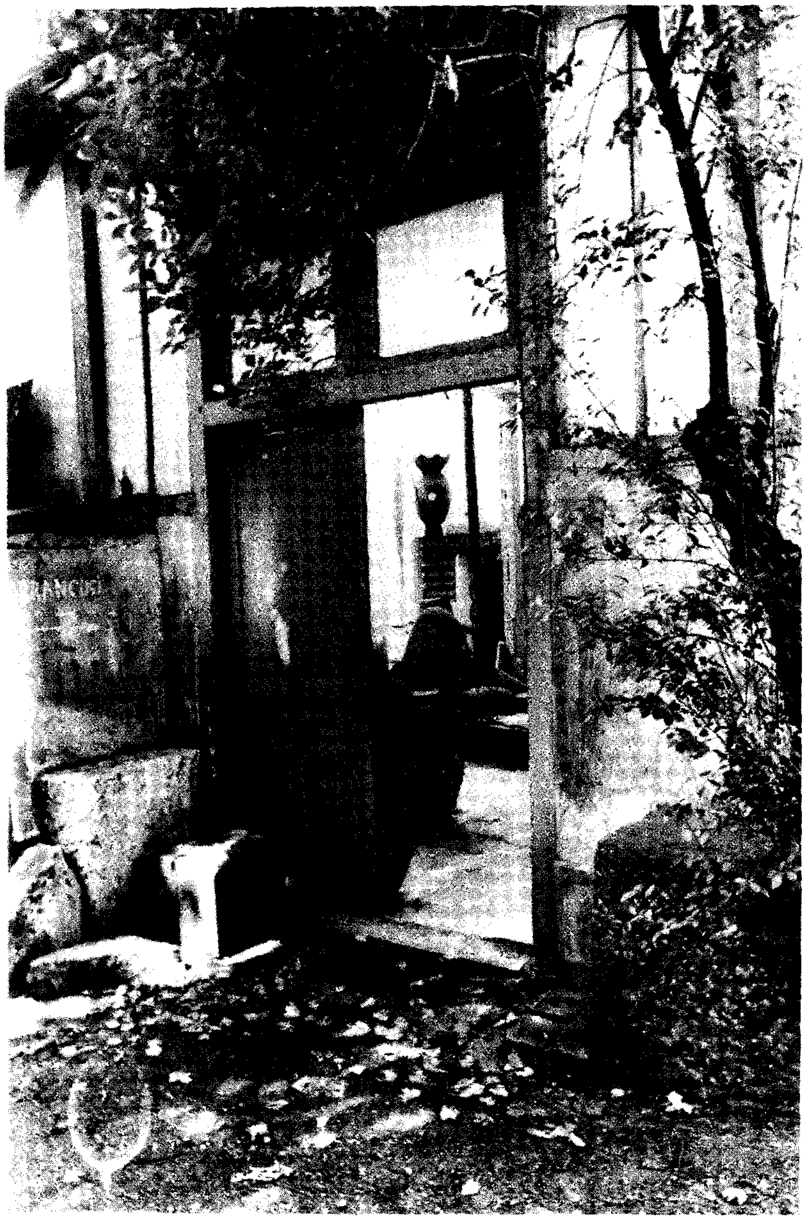
*A glorious Brancusi retrospective comes to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.*

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

OF all the great modernists, Constantin Brancusi is the least well understood. Behind his aura of mystical simplicity—the saintly hermit of the Impasse Ronsin, with his white beard and white cap and white work clothes—he was as worldly and sharp-witted as his close friend Marcel Duchamp, and, in the crucial years before the First World War, as finely attuned to the ideas and influences that were shaping the new art of the twentieth century. Contradiction was his element. He wanted his sculpture to be modern (which meant, above all, to be original), but he also wanted it to exist outside time, like some ancient and essential truth. Even the most radically simplified of his sculptural forms were animated by a tension between opposing forces: archaic and modern, Western and Oriental, simple and complex, earthy and spiritual, rough and smooth. Although his work inspired several generations of abstract artists, Brancusi denied that he had ever tried to make a pure or abstract form. "Those who speak of abstraction when contemplating my sculpture are completely off the track and prove that they have understood nothing," he once said. "For what my work is aiming at is, above all, realism: I pursue the inner, hidden reality, the very essence of objects in their own intrinsic fundamental nature; this is my only deep preoccupation."

We know so little about his life that the salient details have taken on a mythical character. Born in 1876 in a peasant village at the foot of the Carpathians, in a Romania that the French art historian Jean Cassou has described as "essentially prehistoric," he left home at the age of eleven to wander from town to town, and he worked at various jobs—dyer, waiter, fortune-teller, cabinetmaker—until he managed to enroll in the School of Arts and Crafts in the provincial city of Craiova. His vocation settled, he went on to master the techniques of academic sculpture at the National School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, and then, in 1904, set out on his epic journey to Paris—on foot, most of the way, with stopovers in Vienna, Munich, and Zurich. In 1907, he went to work in Rodin's studio, but stayed only a month, because, he later explained, "Nothing grows under big trees." That same year, he abandoned modelling in clay for direct carving in stone, and laid down his challenge to Rodin—David against Goliath—with "The Kiss." This initial, relatively small version of the theme that Brancusi came back to throughout his life is in the first gallery of the glorious Brancusi retrospective that opened earlier this month at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (The show was on view at the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris, last spring and summer, and will be in Philadelphia—its second, and final, stop—through December 31st.) It is a sculpture in whose stripped-down, geometric archaism, intensity, and humor the twentieth century announces itself as clearly as it does in that other 1907 bombshell, Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon." Art as mimesis, the long tradition that reached a kind of apogee in Rodin's own evocations of "The Kiss," has given way to art as direct expression: instead of imitating the real world, art will now become real in itself.

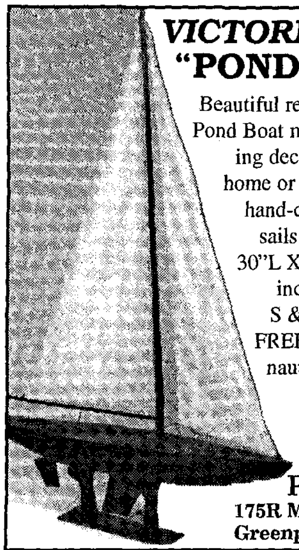
Brancusi's star rose early and has never dimmed. Even Picasso has had critical ups and downs, but Brancusi's reputation as the greatest sculptor of the twentieth century has rarely been questioned, in spite of (cynics might say because of) the fact that his work has been relatively inaccessible. He had never had a retrospective in Paris until this one, and the sculptor, who mistrusted dealers and was reluctant to let go of his work, never had a one-man gallery show in Paris during the fifty years that he lived there. He seemed to find the United States more hospitable. Brancusi had several New York gallery shows, thanks largely to the efforts of Duchamp; he also had retrospectives at the Guggenheim Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago; and over the years Americans were his most important patrons—especially John Quinn, Walter and Louise Arensberg, and Katherine Dreier. "Without the Americans, I would not have been able to produce all this, or even to have existed," he said in 1955, two years before he died.



*A sense of arrested motion: the door to Brancusi's studio, 11 Impasse Ronsin, Paris, photographed by Alexander Liberman in 1955.*

The Americans were not infallible. In 1926, a United States Customs official decided that his bronze "Bird in Space" was not a work of art, and was therefore subject to an import duty of forty per cent of its declared value. Brancusi's appeal was upheld two years later. His American admirers, moreover, tended to understand him too easily. They loved the honest, painstaking craftsmanship, and they saw in his smooth, polished forms a pure distillation of the machine age. Both readings were legitimate but incomplete: they left out the subtle interplay of complex elements which gave Brancusi's sculptures their uncanny, living presence; for example, the off-center balance of the first "Maiastra," the big-chested, miraculous bird of Romanian folklore, whose asymmetrical beak and round eyes also evoke the Egyptian deity Horus. Five decades later, in the sixties, when Brancusi was rediscovered by Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and other minimalist artists, it was the reductive aspects of his sculpture that struck them, and his habit of producing works in series. But Brancusi's simplifications—of birds, fish, the heads of infants and sleeping women, male and female torsos, and other animate subjects—were not reductive in the minimalist sense. He was after "essence," not Greenbergian purity, and his return again and again to the same theme or image was an organic process. There are sixteen versions of "Bird in Space," made of marble and bronze in various sizes, and each one is different. The progressive refinement of the image can be traced, in the eight examples that are on view in Philadelphia, from the rather chunky marble 1923 "Bird in Space" owned by John Quinn, through successively slimmer and more streamlined versions, to the stunning pair commissioned by the Maharaja of Indore in the thirties—one in white marble and the other in black. Brancusi's subject is not a bird, but flight itself, and in the later "Birds in Space" the exquisite proportions, the play of light on polished marble or metal, and the asymmetrical balance evoke a weightless, lifting sensation so kinetic that it takes your breath away.

One of the art-world scandals of our time—and the only serious threat to Brancusi's reputation—is the traffic in posthumous casts of some of his most important works. Brancusi willed his Paris studio and everything in it to the French state, with the understanding that the government would preserve the studio just as he left it; the sculptures, bases, tools, and handmade furniture—the whole carefully nurtured environment—had become a major work of art. While the state dallied and dithered over its obligation, Alexandre Istrati and Natalia Dumitresco, a Romanian artist couple who had moved to the Impasse Ronsin in 1948 and had gradually made themselves indispensable to their aging countryman, took swift and decisive action. Shortly after Brancusi's death, they removed four original sculptures and fifteen plaster casts of other works from the artist's studio. The state eventually



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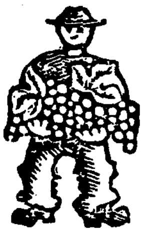

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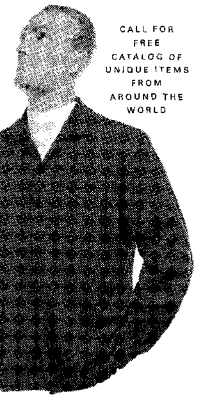

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recovered all nineteen objects, but in the meantime the Istratis (whom Brancusi had named as his *légataires universels*, or residuary legatees) had made copies of the fifteen plaster casts, and soon brand-new versions of "Bird in Space," "Cock," "Sleeping Muse," and other famous Brancusis began turning up on the art market. Litigation failed to stop them. The French court ruled that, since the Istratis owned the copies of the casts, and since Brancusi's will said nothing about posthumous casting, the activity was legal. Most Brancusi experts are appalled by the results, which one curator likens to "airport art." As for Brancusi, who spent hundreds of hours hand-polishing and patinating each cast, who would often make changes in a plaster mold to correct or alter the image, and who insisted again and again that every cast of a Brancusi sculpture was a unique work—well, one can imagine Brancusi's reaction. In spite of the critical consensus on the posthumous casts, quite a few of them are now in museums and private collections.

One of the marvels of the current Brancusi retrospective is that every effort has been made to reunite his sculptures with the bases that he made for them. In the decade after 1910, at about the same time that Brancusi began carving wooden sculptures influenced by African tribal art, he also started to carve wood, marble, and limestone bases for all his works. Like other twentieth-century sculptors, he hated the look of traditional pedestals and platforms; if a sculpture was going to take its place as an object in the real world, rather than as an imitation of something else, it should have no need for that sort of prop. Brancusi's sculptures required something to raise them off the floor, however, and his solution was to make bases that became integral parts of the sculptures, complementing them in various ways. Whether or not his bases are works of art in their own right is a tricky question. In the catalogue of his New York show at the Brummer Gallery, in 1926, Brancusi listed five bases as autonomous objects. Sidney Geist and other critics have stated flatly that the bases are merely decorative objects, and a few collectors and curators, stuck in the purist-abstraction aesthetic of the thirties and forties, would much prefer to do without them. The late American sculptor Scott Burton went to the opposite extreme: in 1989, in a small exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, he presented a selection of Brancusi bases by themselves, as sculptures. "I do not claim that all of them are major works of art, as wonderful as the heads or birds," Burton wrote at the time. "But I do feel that a number of them are . . . works of the same order as his other sculptures." The bases belong with the sculptures—that much is clear. To think otherwise is to misunderstand the essential richness and complexity of the work. Without its launching pad of a base, our National Gallery's great marble "Bird in Space" would be earthbound. The three-part stack of supporting white marble and limestone disks gives MOMA's blue-gray "Fish" its sense of arrested motion, of the still moment before it disappears in a watery flash.

What has happened in recent years, and what the Centre Pompidou–Philadelphia Museum show and its invaluable catalogue make clear, is that Brancusi has been growing on us. We have seen him as the peasant-mystic, the radical modernist, the abstract symbolist and simplifier, and the grandfather of minimalism, but none of our earlier takes on him can explain the extraordinary resonance and staying power of his work. Like his "Endless Column," which started as a motif in his carved wooden bases, became an independent work of art in several different versions and lengths, and eventually rose to a height of thirty metres in its final avatar, Brancusi's art touches infinity. It looks less modern today than it did twenty years ago, and more timeless. The 1918 "Torso of a Young Girl," with its forward movement and delicate sensuality, is revealed in Margit Rowell's catalogue essay as Brancusi's response to the ninth- to twelfth-century Khmer statues in the Musée National d'Arts Asiatiques-Guimet. "Mademoiselle Pogany," whose recurrent appearances in marble and bronze used to disconcert us by her dated, Art Deco look, now begins to look more like a female Buddha. Brancusi's art grows more mysterious as the century approaches its end, and the modernism he embodied—the modernism we had supposedly left behind—shows itself, once again, to be more alive than anything that has come along to take its place. ◆

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THE THEATRE

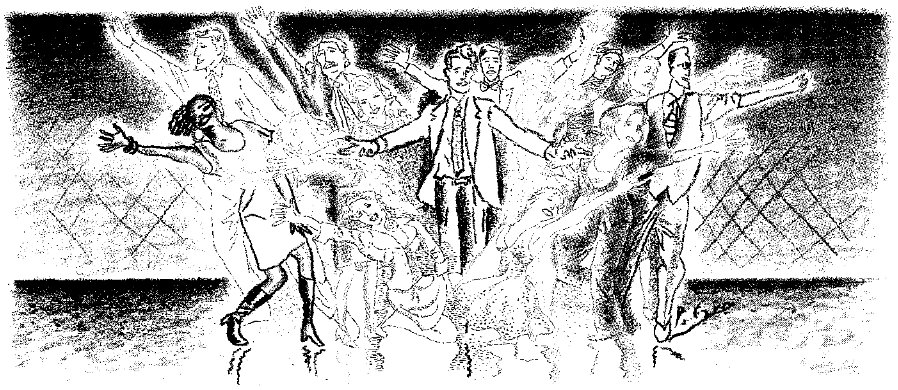
# THE WIZARD OF LOSS

*The Roundabout Theatre brings "Company" back to Broadway.*

BY JOHN LAHR

"COMPANY" was a watershed event in the history of the musical. When it arrived on Broadway, in April, 1970, the American conscience was reeling from two jolts: Vietnam and the sexual revolution. The nation had lost both its sense of blessing and its sense of sin; the musical, which had traditionally made a myth of well-being, suddenly found itself with nothing to celebrate. "Company," engineered by the composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim, the playwright George Furth, the director Harold Prince, the choreographer Michael Bennett, and a terrific ensemble led by Elaine Stritch, proclaimed the nation's newest abundance: emptiness. Instead of providing the backbeat of promise, "Company," with its sour dissection of five marriages in Manhattan, put words to the collective numbness. Exhaustion, not energy, was its theme. Once a call to action, the musical was now a hymn to impotence. At the finale, the hero of the show—the passive, charming, and unmarried Robert—pleads for life instead of inspiring it:

Somebody need me too much,
Somebody know me too well,
Somebody pull me up short
And put me through hell and give me
support
For being alive, make me alive,
Make me alive.



*Astute love songs, and a way to speak about the paralyzed heart: Robert (Boyd Gaines) takes center stage in Stephen Sondheim's "Company."*

PHILIPPE CARON

At a stroke, loss had found its Broadway laureate, and experiment had found its new champion, who, with "Company," began to do away with plot and take the musical in new expressive directions.

George Furth's script was adapted from a series of eleven one-act plays he had written for the actress Kim Stanley. "George writes the kind of people who do not sing," Sondheim told Craig Zadan, the author of "Sondheim & Company." "To spend time exploring the characters was wrong, because they were primarily presented in vignettes. All the songs had to be used, I'm sorry to say, in a Brechtian way as comment and counterpoint. And as such, next to 'Forum,' it was the hardest score I ever had to write." As its terrific title implies, "Company" is an ensemble piece: it inhabits that slippery emotional zone between not quite intimacy and not quite isolation—a gray area that is well suited to the composer's paradoxical sensibility. Sondheim abjures the old illusion, of romance, only to establish a new illusion, of skepticism. He boldly accentuates the negative. "We wanted a show where the audience would sit for two hours screaming their heads off with laughter," Sondheim said, "and then go home and not be able to sleep."

"COMPANY" 'S first revival on Broadway, directed by Scott Ellis, at the Roundabout Theatre, is a problematic production, but it does provide the pleasure of reëxperiencing the songs: "The Little Things You Do Together," "Sorry-Grateful," "You Could Drive a Person Crazy," "Another Hundred People," "Getting Married Today," "Side by Side by Side," and "The Ladies Who Lunch." It's an imposing lineup. While the god of casting does not shine on this production, nothing can dim the brilliance of a score whose themes of fear, loneliness, and anxiety in relationships have, if anything, become more urgent as the battle between the sexes has intensified over the decades.

The musical is set on Robert's thirty-eighth birthday, at a surprise party that serves as a linchpin for the show's anecdotal structure. At the party, Robert (Boyd Gaines) blows out the candles on his cake. "Actually, I didn't wish for anything," he says. Robert doesn't know what he wants or what he feels. He needs connection, but he doesn't have the will to sustain it. He has no identifiable work, just a narcissistic problem. He won't give of himself, because, really, he has no self to give. He is a shell of a man, who plays at feelings. Still, Robert's boyish, tortured aloofness gives Sondheim a way to speak about the paralyzed heart, a subject that is both his strength and his limitation. When I saw the original production, I was a newly married man of twenty-eight; twenty-five years later, with a grown son and a new partner, and poised somewhere between regret and hope, I find that certain songs resonate with more power. "Sorry-Grateful," an astute love song that honors the ambiguity of emotions, now seems an extraordinary accomplishment. Robert asks his alcoholic friend Harry (Robert Westenberg) if he's sorry to be married, and gets this eloquent reply:

> You're always sorry,
> You're always grateful,
> You're always wondering what might
> have been.
> Then she walks in.
> And still you're sorry,
> And still you're grateful,
> And still you wonder and still you doubt,
> And she goes out.

This is not to say that "Company" dramatizes maturity. Although the characters sing about loss, none of them accept the notion of it as the basis of maturity. The consequences of commitment—you choose and you lose—keep Robert from taking action. He can't accept loss, and therefore won't surrender to another. Even at their most caustic moments, Sondheim's songs remain tangled in a particularly American state of mind, an adolescent attitude that insists on having everything all the time. "Marry Me a Little," which was cut from the original score and is restored here at the end of Act I, makes the point. Robert sings:

> Marry me a little,
> Love me just enough. . . .
> Keep a tender distance,
> So we'll both be free
> That's the way it ought to be.

From this production's first beats, "Company" bristles with Robert's fear of engulfment. With the rest of the cast of fourteen ranged around Tony Walton's suitably austere black-and-chrome set, Robert stands center stage, and the ensemble, archly choreographed by Rob Marshall, goes through its semaphore of possessiveness—hands grope, wave, and plead for his presence, and the theatre resounds with the predatory chorus "Bobby Bobby/Bobby Baby/Bobby Bubi"—an effect vulgarly overstated by the projection of Bobby's name in different typefaces on the cyclorama behind them all.

## USEFUL TRANSACTIONS IN PHILOSOPHY

Either you know the password or you don't;
Guessing is useless, guesses get you nowhere.
Sands of the desert! And God knows the language
Is hard enough to speak, let alone write.
When I approached the grille in the plate glass
The shy Jamaican shook her smiling head.
"Sorry, but that is last week's word," she said.

Once or twice I was privy to the secret,
But not for long; and again there were knots
Of snake-haired girls whispering in the shadows
At the farther end of the classroom corridor.
In the financial district I looked down
From the visitors' gallery at the war
And camaraderie of the market floor.

At the theatre we often took a box
("Steering clear of infection," said my mother).
Yes, champagne was provided for the coterie,
But I sat soberly alongside, watching
The golden apples fly from hand to hand
As ingénue Russian princesses played
In the walled garden where the pacts were made.

Impossible, of course, to speak with nabobs
Or reclusive grandees holed up in palaces;
For them belonging is part of genetics.
Acquiescence is looked for, eyes on the ground,
Just follow the trail of elephant dung
Along yesterday's ceremonial way
While golden boys and girls go out to play.

—FERGUS ALLEN

Robert and his friends are a symbiotic network, a group of lost souls distracting each other from their emptiness. Robert goes through the motions of affection and sex, but nothing penetrates him. "You impersonate a person better than a zombie should," his three frustrated girlfriends sing in "You Could Drive a Person Crazy." And, of course, they're right: deadness ("Sweeney Todd," "Passion," "Assassins") is Sondheim's dominion, and terror is his most eloquent emotion. In "Getting Married Today," Veanne Cox, as the would-be bride, Amy, gives fear its most delightful outing, in the show's best-written scene. With her bandy legs and bony hands shaking, she works herself into a tizzy on the morning of her wedding. Pale and bug-eyed, she's a whirlwind of self-loathing who knocks the audience dead when she crawls across the stage and sings:

> We'll both be losing our identities—
> I telephoned my analyst about it
> But he said to see him Monday,
> And by Monday I'll be floating
> In the Hudson with the other garbage.

She tells her fiancé, Paul (the sad-eyed, convincing Danny Burstein), that she can't go through with it. Before Paul stalks out, he asks her, "Do you know if other people did to you what you do to yourself, they could be put in jail?" Robert, standing by as Paul's prospective best man, witnesses the quarrel. When Paul leaves, Robert abruptly asks Amy to marry him. Amy's comeback is an admonishment: "You have to want to marry *some*body, not just some*body*." Robert tosses Amy the bouquet, and she catches it at the threshold. "I'm the next bride," she tells him, and she exits in search of Paul.

In the original production, the orchestration was for twenty or so; here, it is for nine. And the orchestra is not the only sound that's attenuated. The air is full of miked, thin voices. Boyd Gaines, who had been suffering from laryngitis, strains in the higher registers, and, I'm sorry to report, goes flat in the big ballads; this diminishes the impact of "Marry Me a Little" and virtually snuffs out "Being Alive." Debra Monk, as the foul-mouthed, slouch-shouldered dipsomaniac Joanne, gives two boffo songs, "The Little Things You Do Together" and "The Ladies Who Lunch," plenty of attitude. She doesn't so much sing as blare "Ladies," but when her voice cracks, the stridency works for the boozy broad she plays. Monk knows how to deliver a punch line, and her rendition of the song zeroes in on the impasse that her drunken mockery represents:

> Another chance to disapprove,
> Another brilliant zinger,
> Another reason not to move,
> Another vodka Stinger—
> Aaah—I'll drink to that.

La Chanze, who plays Marta, one of Robert's beleaguered squeezes, has the voice but not the attitude. Her rendition of "Another Hundred People," a dark, jaded report on "a city of strangers," becomes merely a Broadway "numba," all teeth and smiles but no texture. Why is she smiling? It's a secret between her and the director and is lost on the audience, which, in any case, can't hear the best lines of the song, because of her poor diction.

At the end of the show, Robert decides not to walk through the door into his birthday party. It may come as a surprise to some theatregoers—it was to me—that the past two and a half hours have been flashbacks of Robert's past, and that he has been poised at the threshold throughout. (Scott Ellis never properly prepares the audience for this chronological trick.) Along with Robert's friends, we've been stiffed. By the logic that only a Broadway musical can sustain, the finale proposes that Robert has made a choice to love—or, at least, to be open to the possibility of involvement. But his first gesture is to cut himself off from his community of friends. Growth is shown as isolation. The implications of this are even more unsatisfactory than the romantic tosh that Sondheim is rebelling against: it is the forced victory of the failed heart over the full heart. The lameness of this finale foreshadows the pretentiousness and aridity of many of Sondheim's later shows: a new path that is really a dead end. Yet in "Company," the first product of the composer's most prolific period, Sondheim's skepticism is still rooted in a recognizably real world, where feelings are not postures, and doubts have not ossified into nihilism. I suppose I'll always have my quarrels with Sondheim, and with the direction in which he has taken the musical. But when he is good, he's great. Even the Roundabout's lacklustre production can't keep the show's daring from coming through. So let's call "Company" a triumph, and the hell with it. ♦

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# SHOUTS & MURMURS

## APARTMENT HUNTER

### BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

O. J. Simpson is considering moving from his posh estate in the Brentwood section of Los Angeles to New York City.—*The New York Post.*

To the 1040 Fifth Avenue Coöperative Association:

I am pleased to write in support of Mr. Simpson's application to become a member of your coöperative.

I have known Mr. Simpson for many years. I would describe him as a devoted family man. As you may be aware, he has recently suffered the devastating loss of his former wife, to whom he was very close. But he is strong and his attitude is "Life must go on."

Initially, his plan was to return to his home and raise his children according to his own strong sense of family values. But the crime problem in Brentwood persuades him that it is time to look elsewhere, and so he has decided to move with the children to New York, where they can have a "normal" upbringing.

Sincerely,
Robert Kardashian

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning!

O. J. Simpson will make an *excellent* tenant in your building. I can truthfully say I know him intimately, having spent a lot of time with him recently. He is a godly man who has suffered bitterly at the hands of the unrighteous. His only desire right now, apart from seeing that the Colombian drug dealers who slew his ex-wife and her companion are brought to justice, is to raise his children in an atmosphere of serenity and security.

I understand that the late Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, another parent of two young children left bereft by a senseless act of violence, lived in your building, so you are familiar with these tragedies, and the need to be sensitive and sympathetic to the victims.

In the matter of finances, I can say without fear of contradiction that Mr. Simpson will be more than able to meet the necessary requirements. His financial future shines brightly indeed!

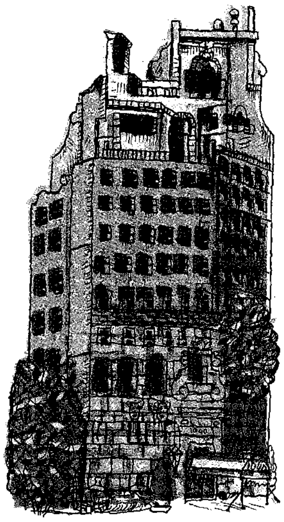
Sincerely,
Johnnie Cochran

To the board:

O. J. Simpson will make an ideal tenant, and you should move expeditiously to approve his application.

Aside from the reflected glory that all your tenants would share in having a tenant of his stature, there is an additional benefit—my own occasional presence in the building. As you know, it was I who masterminded his entire defense strategy, despite the fact that my esteemed colleague Mr. Cochran seems to be crowding the limelight. My only point is that I am the most brilliant legal mind in the United States, and my occasional visits to the Simpson duplex at 1040 would lend great respectability to all of you.

Another of my clients, Mr. Claus von Bülow, lived on Fifth Avenue, and my visits to his apartment brought considerable social stature to his co-tenants.



I should add that in the event you turn down Mr. Simpson's application I will be handling the appeal. The upside for you would be spending many, many hours in my presence. The downside would be legal fees that will force you to send your children to public schools.

Sincerely,
Alan Dershowitz

This is A.C.:

He's got a gun to his head. You better let him come live in your building. Be cool with this. He just wants to chill out. Everyone needs to chill out here.

Do you have a parking garage? Also, what is the freeway situation in New York in case we need to go for a quick cruise?

Sincerely,
Al (A.C.) Cowlings

Dear Mr. Simpson:

The Coöperative Association has met to discuss your application. We reviewed the many strong letters of recommendation submitted by your friends and associates.

After almost four hours of deliberation, the board unanimously voted "Not Approved." Let me hasten to say that this decision had nothing whatsoever to do with race, or the notoriety surrounding the recent unfortunate events. It was simply that the board, recalling your statements regarding your activities on the night of June 12, 1994, took note of your predilection for nocturnal golfing on the premises.

The board felt rather strongly that nocturnal golfing is inappropriate in a Fifth Avenue duplex, and therefore decided to pass on your application, with the keenest regret.

Sincerely,
1040 Fifth Avenue
Coöperative Association

GARY PANTER

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